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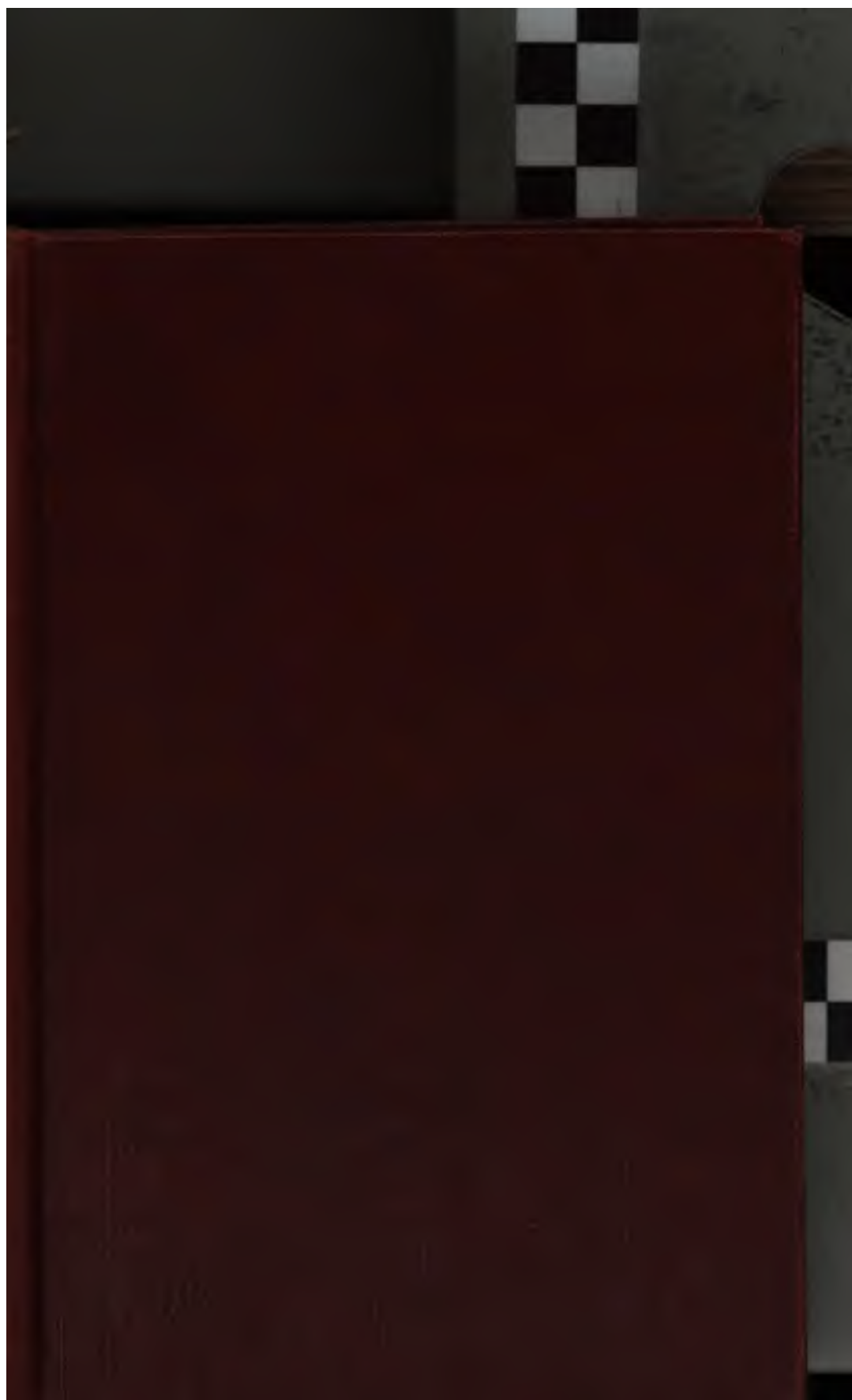
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# THE STAGE IN AMERICA

1897-1900

BY

NORMAN HAPGOOD

AUTHOR OF "ABRAHAM LINCOLN, THE MAN OF THE PEOPLE"  
"DANIEL WEBSTER," "LITERARY STATESMEN," ETC.

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

LONDON: MACMILLAN & CO., LTD.

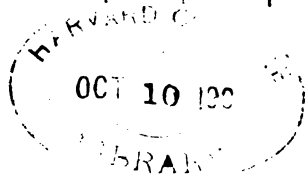
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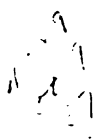
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## NOTE

IN writing this book, which is designed to describe, in what can be seen on the American stage to-day, those things of most importance to a thinking observer of the drama, I have incorporated much already printed in the *Commercial Advertiser* and the *Bookman*; a chapter on "the drama of ideas" from the *Contemporary Review*; one on the "syndicate" from the *International Monthly*; parts of two essays in the *Atlantic Monthly*; and a few lines from the *Forum*. To the editors of these publications thanks are due for permission to reprint.

N. H.







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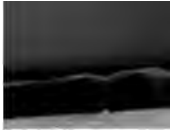
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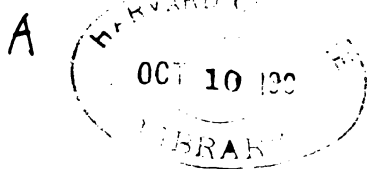
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# THE STAGE IN AMERICA

(1897-1900)

## INTRODUCTION

So many influences enter into the formation of a dramatic opinion, or even into the mere narration of theatrical incident, that to select among the facts, impressions, and beliefs of four years, those which sum up the period, is full of peril. After reversing my view of Henry Esmond's ability in comedy, or of the degree of Mrs. Fiske's talent, what shall I think of my next conviction? The difficulty is not new: even Goethe has written foolish things about *Hamlet*; the sharp difference between him and Schiller over *Egmont* was on a subject where both were masters; the meanderings of Tolstoi's *What is Art?* are matched by aberrations of Hume, Voltaire, Johnson, and Dryden.

“Wahrheit suchen wir Beide, du aussen im Leben, ich innen  
In dem Herzen, und so findet sie jeder gewiss.  
Ist das Auge gesund, so begegnet es aussen dem Schöpfer;  
Ist es das Herz, dann gewiss spiegelt es innen die welt.”

Yet how often was there contradiction between what Goethe said and what Schiller felt. Lessing said that criticism had raised him from mediocrity

almost to genius, and the world needs it; but is the critic a policeman, a judge, or a professor? Shall he encourage the valuable, or destroy the unfit? Shall he talk to the author, the actor, or the public?

"Praise, praise, praise!" exclaims Mr. Pinero, who reads no hostile comment, but sometimes commits laudatory notices to memory. Yet what is most helpful for the sensitive playwright would lead astray the man who pays two dollars for his seat.

Besides these general problems, there are a hundred lesser difficulties for the critic. What has seemed genius appears as only cleverness, and talent comes to be seen as merely personal charm.

x How tell the actor's contribution from the playwright's; the interest of the subject from its treatment? A prominent American manager, visiting London, looking for plays, after a bad dinner poorly served, was crowded into the middle of a back row. He refused the comedy. A few nights later he dined with the dramatist, went again to see his play, and sat near the stage. He then bought the comedy, which turned out to be one of his greatest successes.

I remember walking one night on Broadway alone. I walked up and down and became more and more bored. From Fourteenth Street to Fortieth the houses of amusement all hung out

signs intended to be alluring, but they didn't allure. Some were heavy, some silly, some familiar.

At Forty-second Street another sign brightened the distance. It was *Iolanthe*. Here at last was Gilbert, wittiest of living men, nimble and airy, more dramatic and far more intelligent than anybody else in town. My spirits beat, and as I took my seat, these verses were being sung by a peer of Great Britain to a rustic shepherdess: —

“ Her origin's lowly, it's true,  
But of birth and position I've plenty ;  
I've grammar and spelling for two,  
And blood and behavior for twenty.”

There was Gilbert at his best, shining in the midst of the gloomy night. What humor was in the peer's complaint: —

“ Hearts just as pure and fair  
May beat in Belgrave Square  
As in the lowly air of Seven Dials.”

And again: —

“ Recollect yourself, I pray,  
And be careful what you say,  
As the ancient Romans said, *festina lente* ;  
For I really do not see  
How so young a girl could be  
The mother of a man of five-and-twenty.”

Even in delicate unreality one of the most important elements in any work of art is the con-

ception of the whole—the plot, the fable, and the peers and the fairies suited me that night better than any story in the world. Happily there was little danger of Gilbert being overpraised, but since the company was wretched, my enthusiasm over that performance was surely in large part due to a need just then of fantastic charm.

In other cases it is not the mood that turns the scale, but the evidence. *Grierson's Way* seemed to me a strong play. After seeing *My Lady's Lord* and *One Summer's Day* I boldly proclaimed that Mr. Esmond's talent was all serious, his comedy feeble. Then came *When We Were Twenty-one*, and that proclamation had to be repealed. One night, being forced to choose between *Magda* and *The King's Musketeer*, I said to myself: "The one is gray realism, the other buoyant imagination. The one has the depressing culture of Sudermann, the other the barbaric genius of Dumas. The gifted actress wastes her power on joyless studies, while the attractive Sothern goes less for thought than for charm. To hell with the leaden casket. Give me the golden."

At *The King's Musketeer* I had a glorious evening, despite the mediocre work of the playwright Hamilton, his elimination of the literary charm of Dumas, his own weak contributions, and his failure to make a play. It was delightful be-

cause of those splendid melodramatic situations of Dumas, a beverage of which, in a world containing too much burdening and too little imaginative truth, I desired to drink long and deep.

A week passed and I went to see *Magda*. Without enthusiasm, with Ibsen's insistent gloom in my imagination, and in my memory the failure of even Duse to interest me in the play, I wearily entered the theatre. Our humorist Oliver Herford had confessed a day or two before that his conscience was always either dormant or delirious. This play set mine raving. The construction and the character-drawing were so full of power and ease, the performance was so true and gracious, that the reasoning which had preferred the flamboyant exhibition seemed a sin.

So much for personal confession. The following pages may contain statements which in other years I shall wish unsaid, but they are the carefully sifted remainder of four years of professional theatre-going in America. My object has been to describe conditions generally, and to make a record of some of the more notable performances, leaving the vast majority in that obscurity which befits them.



## CHAPTER I

### THE SYNDICATE

IN the recent development of the drama in America there has been no single phenomenon so distinct and strong as what has been commonly called the Theatrical Trust. Its growth was rapid, its power immense, and the history of its rise, if intimately known, sounds like a melodrama or a satirical romance.

Average human nature among actors and managers has many constant features. The trust grew out of the love of money. It is wholly commercial. How many outside of it are much influenced by unselfish considerations? There is some truth in talk about art, but more cant. Most of the trouble between the actors and the Syndicate has been over terms, and, in most cases, when the players who talked most about intelligence and freedom were offered more money, they became silent.


The excessive love of wealth is one of the gloomy qualities of American life. It influences you, the reader, and me, the writer, as well as the actor, the playwright, and the manager. In all





walks there will be found exceptions. Augustin Daly worked for fame and his immediate satisfaction, producing only as many mere money-makers as he needed to continue his career. Heinrich Conried, a German to be sure, gives up to cheap farces only as many weeks of each year as will enable him to produce, during the remainder of the season, worthy modern plays and the great classics. Even when the mercenary spirit exists it need not be absolute. Richard Mansfield spoke large words about his independence, and when the temptation came he ate them. Yet it does not follow that he cares nothing for art. Not even the power of the Syndicate, for instance, could force him wholly into plays of innocuous idiocy, as it does some of his fellows. In this story the heroes are not angels, or the weaker persons villains, although most of them are frail.

During the season of 1895-96 it became known that a combination was being formed to control many theatres, consisting of Nixon and Zimmerman of Philadelphia; Klaw and Erlanger, and Hayman and Frohman, both of New York. By February it was announced that thirty-seven first-class theatres were in the hands of the Syndicate. To each of the houses thirty weeks of "attractions" were to be guaranteed. The essence of the system, from that day to this, with constantly



increasing scope and power, has been that the theatres take mainly such plays as the Syndicate desires, on the dates which it desires, and receive in return an unbroken succession of companies, with none of the old-time idle weeks. Another inducement to the owners of theatres was the promise of better terms from travelling managers; but the actual outcome of that idea is not so clear.

Avoidance of conflicting plays, or of a series of plays too much alike, was also one of the proposed advantages, but this has turned out a difficult object to gain, especially with the necessity of changing all dates to suit big Syndicate successes; and many theatres have the ordinary padding, farce comedies, for weeks at a time.

This combination was made possible by the prior work of the individual firms composing the Syndicate. Hayman had gained control of many theatres in the far West, and Klaw and Erlanger gradually secured a number on the route from Washington to New Orleans. Few companies can afford to jump the distance between those two cities, so with the best houses in Richmond, Norfolk, Columbia, Atlanta, Montgomery, and Mobile in their hands, Klaw and Erlanger were practically masters of that territory. Later they obtained similar power over the route coming down from Ohio or Pennsylvania through Tennessee, until they could dictate to companies



wishing to go from Pittsburg, Cincinnati, or Chicago to New Orleans. A Southern manager tried to get enough theatres to keep New Orleans open from the North, but failed. The first of the large cities to be entirely controlled was Philadelphia, where the theatres were in the power of Nixon and Zimmerman; and at first the most the Syndicate could do was to shut a company out of the Quaker City; but soon a number of cities of almost equal importance were barred. To be practically controlled, a city need not have all of its theatres in the hands of the Syndicate. If the routes approaching it are dominated, the power is almost equally complete. San Francisco, for instance, has an independent theatre, the California, but few companies from the East can afford to go to the Pacific coast without playing in such places as Denver, Salt Lake City, Omaha, Toledo, New Orleans, St. Paul, Minneapolis, Kansas City, in all of which towns the leading theatres are under syndicate control. When it is remembered that most of these are one-week stands, the difficulty of getting along without them will be obvious. Control of the one-night stands, especially in the rather unprofitable South, is less important for the better class of companies, but to be shut out of Cleveland, for instance, where no theatre of any kind is free, means much. Detroit and Providence are further illustrations, as are smaller

places like Utica, Syracuse, Wilkesbarre, Rochester, Reading, Lowell (Massachusetts), Newark (New Jersey), and Jersey City.

Of course it is possible for a company, if it finds all the first-class theatres barred, to go into second- or third-class houses, if there happen to be any. When the formation of the Syndicate was first rumored, and fear and incredulity were showing themselves about equally among the travelling managers, Joseph Brooks, who now has close relations with the Syndicate, said: "Suppose a trust controlled the best theatres in Boston, and for some reason tried to shut out Mr. Crane. What would be the result? Why, I should simply go to a second-class house and raise the prices, and thus bring another first-class house into the field."<sup>1</sup>

This escape, which was neat enough in theory, has accomplished little. The manager of a cheap theatre dislikes to raise his prices for a single engagement, because his public is likely to be displeased; so he will do it only for particularly profitable companies. Again, the "attraction" which goes into a house out of its class loses the advantage of the theatre's clientele, and only a very strong attraction can afford to do that. There are always a certain number of theatre-goers whose habits are almost irrevocably con-

<sup>1</sup> Most of the quotations in this chapter are from newspapers; a few from private letters.

nected with certain houses. These people would go to see a play at Powers's in Chicago, perhaps, where they would never think of going to see the same play and the same actors on the West side. They saw *The Moth and the Flame* at the Lyceum Theatre in New York, but not at the Grand Opera House. Another set saw *A Female Drummer* when it was at the Manhattan, but not when it was at the Star. The failure of that very able play *Griffith Davenport* in New York in 1899, at the Herald Square, was attributed partly to its appearance in a theatre where frivolous pieces had preceded it. That was pushing the principle too far, and it is often pushed too far; but it none the less counts for much. It was on this theory, indeed, that Mr. Hayman laid great stress in his newspaper defence of the Syndicate, holding that as the theatre, not the company, drew the audience, the division of profits should be more favorable to the local managers.

There is not even a barn free in Cleveland; but in Brooklyn, for instance, the manager of a dramatic company hostile to the Syndicate might go to the Academy of Music, and if his attraction was strong enough he could overcome the obstacle of the identity of that house with other forms of entertainment. In Toronto, Pittsburg, Buffalo, Columbus, he could take a similar course. In Louisville he could play in a big music hall. In

Cincinnati he could go to the Pike Opera House, where the highest seats are usually seventy-five cents, double the prices, and meet, in this case, little difficulty with the clientele, since it is made by a stock company which, though cheaper in price, draws the same kind of people as the more expensive theatres. There is the same condition in Baltimore. The larger the city the more difficult is it to overcome the character of the theatre. If Mrs. Fiske should appear in a music hall in Buffalo, for instance, the reasons would be understood and her business would be but little damaged. If she went to the Bijou in Brooklyn, or a similar theatre in Boston, or, a few years ago, before it became geographically unavailable, to the Park Theatre in Philadelphia, she would suffer badly, because these places are so large that the attention necessary to overcome the things taken for granted cannot be rapidly concentrated on any one event. If even Duse or Bernhardt should appear at high prices in New York City at the Star or Fourteenth Street, thousands among those who would flock to the Knickerbocker or the Empire would never think of entering the new ground.

As this great combination has fastened its grip more and more strongly on all the principal cities, some theatres have avoided ruin by becoming the homes of stock companies. Some of them are

competent and profitable, and their use in keeping alive the best plays after they have had their first vogue is considerable. One may sometimes find plays at the Murray Hill Theatre in New York, for twenty-five cents, which will be essentially better than anything which then happens to be purchasable for two dollars, on Broadway. These companies exist also in Cincinnati, Pittsburg, Boston, Montreal, Columbus, Indianapolis, and many other cities, with apparent prosperity. If the richer class of theatre-goers had as many repertory theatres run for their benefit as their humbler fellow-citizens, they would have no cause for complaint.

The reception of the idea when this combination was first discussed makes a dramatic contrast to subsequent history. Managers tried to organize in opposition, and immediately failed. Then the leading actors took a hand, and their story is touching. Nat Goodwin, Francis Wilson, and Richard Mansfield were the leaders in an effort to form a combination of stars, strong enough to defy the Syndicate and make their own dates with the theatres, and their own terms. They said, with undoubted truth, that if there were a dozen very popular actors who refused to give up their business independence, the Syndicate could never become a real monopoly, and probably could not last. Mr. Goodwin's lawyers,

therefore, drew up an agreement, to be signed by leading actors first, and later by as many others as chose to join. Finally, early in 1898, a different agreement was signed by a few actors, to last until the end of 1899.

It provided that, as "both artistically and pecuniarily the good of the many is being subordinated to the profit of the few by the combination before mentioned," an association was to be formed "for the promotion and protection of an independent stage in this country." The members were to book either through the executive committee of the association, or directly; the only point being that they should not book through any agencies or exchanges; practically meaning, that they should not book through Klaw and Erlanger, the booking branch of the Syndicate, although they could play in the Syndicate theatres if the local managers would deal directly with them. A sum of five thousand dollars was to be forfeited by any member who did not keep his agreement and pay his assessments.

This last provision frightened one or two of the actors interested, but the agreement was ultimately signed by Francis Wilson, James A. Herne, James O'Neill, Richard Mansfield, and Mrs. Fiske. Nat Goodwin had gone over to the Syndicate long before this. The *World* gave this account of his performance: —



“The Trust settled this opposition characteristically and in short order. Knowing Goodwin to be the head and front, the life and soul, of this effort, they tackled him with the promise of giving him dates where and when he wanted them, and of a long engagement at the Trust’s Knickerbocker Theatre. Goodwin’s weakness for New York engagements being well known to them, they induced him to desert the embryonic alliance of stars and join issue with the Trust.”

Joseph Jefferson, whose high position made his assistance much desired by the rebels, on March 13, 1897, had a signed telegram in the *New York Herald*, in which he said:—

“The first that I heard of a Theatrical Syndicate was the receipt of a letter from one of its leading managers, desiring me to play at one of its theatres. At the same time I got a communication from one of the anti-Syndicate managers, trusting that I would not join the new combine, which he deprecated as an unfair movement, and asking me not to desert his house. I declined the offer of the Syndicate manager and acted with my old one. Another old manager from one of the anti-Syndicate theatres wrote me in the same strain, and asked my advice as to how he should act to protect himself against the ‘octopus who was gradually coiling himself around the old legitimate managers.’ I was about to reply and encourage him to meet the matter boldly, and that I would stand by him, when, to my surprise, I found that both of the old managers had joined the ‘octopus.’”

About this time Francis Wilson announced that he had cancelled all contracts for Syndicate

houses, and would never play in one of them again. Mr. Hayman said that, on the contrary, the Syndicate had broken its dates with Mr. Wilson, because he had held time in two theatres in Washington without the knowledge of the Syndicate. He also said: —

“Mr. Wilson was a shining mark, and we determined to make an example of him for the benefit of lesser offenders.”

Mr. Wilson gave out the following statement: —

“Our difficulty with the Syndicate is precisely the result I predicted, last summer, would be one of the advantages of aiding and abetting such a combine. Disagreement over one or two dates would lead to the arbitrary cancelling of the whole season's tour if intrusted to their hands. They denied, with wounded feelings, that they would ever be so base as to abuse their power. They were most plausible then. They had ostensibly combined for two most worthy purposes, — to protect the strong attractions from playing in opposition to each other, and to restore, to a position of profit, many theatres throughout the country that had been losing money. I feel sure I am correct when I make the assertion that more than two-thirds of the managers, travelling and resident, are bitterly opposed to the organization and the policy of this combination of speculators, pure and simple, yet such has been its growth and its arrogance that fear and self-protection from its arbitrary power have prompted them to submit to its dictation, temporarily at least.”

The newspapers all over the country took up the fight, the *World* leading the attack, for some time, until it was overcome by sudden quiet, the *Sun* almost alone taking an active position in favor of the Syndicate. In March, 1897, the *Dramatic Mirror* sent out sixty-five letters to managers, asking their views, and received only six replies, showing what awe the combination already inspired. An actor, Wilton Lackaye, remarked later in an interview in a Southern newspaper, the Nashville *American*, that one thing only was certain, the actor who took sides would be injured, whether he spoke on one side or the other. In spite of danger, however, a number of significant opinions found their way into print during the next few months, among them these:—

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS:—

“Not merely one industry, but civilization, itself, is concerned, for the morals and education of the public are directly influenced by the stage. Every one who takes a pride in the art of his country must regret a monopoly of the theatre, for that means ‘business’ and not art.”

THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH:—

“The inevitable result of a Theatre Trust would be deterioration in the art of acting and discouragement of dramatic literature. Certainly that is not a consummation devoutly to be wished.”

AUGUSTIN DALY : —

"I do not believe that the best interests of dramatic art nor the highest aims of the theatre will be served if the spirit of competition is chilled, crippled, or destroyed ; and the first aim of all such combinations or syndicates must be to absorb opposition and to kill off rivals or rivalry."

BRANDER MATTHEWS : —

"The history of the theatre abounds in attempts at monopoly. Some of them seem to succeed for a little. All of them fail in the end. All such attempts are foredoomed to inevitable failure. The stars, in their courses, fight against them."

JOSEPH JEFFERSON : —

"When the Trust was formed, I gave my opinion as against it, considering it inimical to the theatrical profession. I think so still."

RICHARD MANSFIELD : —

"Art must be free. I consider the existence of the Trust or Syndicate a standing menace to art. Its existence is, in my opinion, an outrage and unbearable."

MRS. FISKE : —

"The incompetent men who have seized upon the affairs of the stage in this country have all but killed art, worthy ambition, and decency."

FRANCIS WILSON : —

"Dramatic art, in America, is in great danger. A number of speculators have it by the throat, and are gradually but surely squeezing it to death."

JAMES A. HERNE :—

"The underlying principle of a Theatrical Trust is to subjugate the playwright and the actor. Its effect will be to degrade the art of acting, to lower the standard of the drama, and to nullify the influences of the theatre."

Henry Irving once gave his views in the *London Chronicle* on this subject :—

"When I was in America, lately, a deputation of actors assured me that the Syndicate System is the curse of the American stage. Actor-managers, at all events, have made sacrifices for their calling, and protected its interests, and it will be an evil day for those interests when they are left to the mercy of speculation."

Francis Wilson drew a cartoon which represented the Trust as a huge octopus, the scales labelled with the various ills which he imputed to the Syndicate, some of these charges being fair, some malicious. Mr. Wilson and Mr. Mansfield kept up a constant fire in speeches before the curtain. Mr. Wilson said, at Buffalo, as quoted in the *News* of that city on December 12, 1897 :—

"This Trust is an ubiquitous invention of the enemy, to harass and squeeze out the life and soul and all ambitions of players, who are anxious to advance the interests of their profession."

He said, in Boston, on December 19 :—

"If these men have their way, this will, perhaps, be the last time that I shall have the honor and pleasure of appearing before you."

In another speech he said : —

"Who loves fair play more than an American, and what choicer subject could one select upon which to address an American public than that of independence?"

On December 2, he sent this to the *World*: —

"We are in the hands of the enemy; God help us.

"FRANCIS WILSON."

In the same paper, a few days later, appeared the following characteristic effusion: —

"*Quid Octopus hic?*

"It is merely a question how far each actor is ready to be a hero in the fight.

"It is not conceivable that any artist, who respects himself and his profession, can be forced to submit to these speculators; unless the actor is wilfully blind he must know the method the Trust employs. Every actor who puts a dollar into the pocket of the Trust is supplying a new link for his own fetters. Every actor who works for the Trust is working against his fellow-artists.

"The Trust cajoles where presently it will command. Once it succeeds in accomplishing its present purpose, there will be nothing but the Trust. Ambition will be futile. The independent actor-manager will have to disappear. The public will be obliged to take what the Trust gives it. Actors will be able to obtain employment only through the Trust. Playwrights will be dependent upon the Trust. Theatrical advertisements, since there will be no competition, will be limited to

two-line announcements, and also the dramatic critic's occupation will be gone. This is not fiction. It is truth. Shall actors be beggars at the door of the Trust? It is the artist that the people go to see, him and his work. It is the artist in whom the people are interested, not the members of the Trust.

"Recent experiences have confirmed my intention to play in halls or dime museums, in preference to houses controlled by the Trust. "RICHARD MANSFIELD."

On December 18, Francis Wilson said, in New Haven:—

"There are a few of us nobler spirits, and I think I may justly say that we are nobler spirits, who will not submit to the dictation of the Trust. Some of those who do not wear the yoke of this combination are Richard Mansfield, James A. Herne, Mrs. Fiske, and three or four others, and we hope that we may be permitted to follow our art without paying tribute to the Trust."

The next month a paper on the Trust appeared in the *Dramatic Mirror*, from which these are extracts:—

"Its characteristics are greed, cunning, and inhuman selfishness.

"Every actor in America should at once join the Actors' Society of America.

"Stars, heading successful organizations, should learn this truth: Self-interest is best secured through the ability of the many to gratify their reasonable wants, not through the ability of the few to dictate terms and conditions.

"The few leading actors who are standing for the independence of the American actor, and for the liberty of the stage, will not desert you. They cannot be cajoled, intimidated, or bribed ; you may trust them. They may be beaten, but not subjugated.

"I regret that Mr. Jefferson has taken no action. He was cradled in the theatre. The theatre made him famous. The actors loved and honored him. I can well wish he had espoused their cause.

"I hope that Mr. Goodwin, who does stand for the highest art he sees, will speedily learn that the Trust, which grants him personal immunity, will withdraw that concession the instant it is strong enough to do without him. He is an artist, and his place is among the independent stars.

"As for me, I was an actor when the members of the Trust were in swaddling clothes. It is conceded that I have contributed something to the literature of the stage and to dramatic art, and I therefore refuse to be driven from the stage of my country, by the gentlemen who have the lessees and owners of a number of playhouses by the throat.

"JAMES A. HERNE."

By this time, most of the rebels had succumbed. Fanny Davenport had written, in August : —

"Of two evils I believe in taking the lesser, and as that was really a beneficial evil to me, I did not hesitate. I could not believe it wise or dignified to play cheap houses even at high prices, nor politic to be shut out of my strongest cities with a new play on my hands. It would have been 'cutting off my nose to spite my face,' and as Messrs. Klaw and Erlanger met my wishes



in every and all particulars, I could really see no sense in opposing them in filling the dates I desired.

"Our theatrical career at the best is short, and I have come to the conclusion that friends are better than enemies in it. There are now not five managers out of the Syndicate: Mr. Schoeffel, . . . Mr. Miner, Mr. Hopkins, and in no other city are any but cheap houses open. If you are met with perfect accord and every wish granted, what sense, save a childish one, in standing out?"


Others took the course thus frankly described. Look for a moment at the story of Richard Mansfield.

In December, Mr. Mansfield wrote to one of the combination of stars, usually called the Anti-trust:

"Let me persuade you and the other members to ask Mr. Daly to accept the presidency. He is a man of great executive ability, of great influence, and has a commanding position. Moreover, he has his theatre in New York, and he can give time and thought to our cause (which is the cause of the actor all over the world), and will therefore deeply interest *him*.

"I shall be most happy to serve in the ranks, and you perceive I am firing away as hard as I can."

Mr. Daly refused, on the ground that he knew actors and would not trust them to hold out an instant in the face of temptation. Was he right? On January 24, 1898, it was announced in the morning papers that Mr. Mansfield had reconsidered his position, and intended to play in Syndicate theatres.



He wrote himself, June 22: "People will class us amongst the 'unsuccessful,' if we do anything more just now in this direction, and fight chimeras." As soon as he was safely at peace with the Syndicate, his manager, Mr. A. M. Palmer, wrote to one of the few remaining members of the opposition:—

"I think he regrets that he signed the agreement and blames me for having persuaded him to sign it against his own judgment. At the same time he does not wish it to be understood that he does not fully sympathize with you in the unselfish struggle you have made against monopoly, and he would be the last to jeopardize the successful issue of your efforts."

Two prominent actors stood now practically alone in the fight. Mr. Herne became silent. Mrs. Fiske and Mr. Wilson were still standing by their guns. Augustin Daly quietly maintained his independence. He said little, but he meant what he said. He booked where he chose, and it is said that when Klaw and Erlanger tried to dictate to him, he sent a sharp reply. Had he not suddenly died soon after, it is reasonably certain that he would either have played entirely outside of Syndicate theatres, or that Klaw and Erlanger would have yielded. Daly's theatre is now the property of Mr. Daniel Frohman. Almost every month shows another theatre added to the list.

Mr. Wilson continued to talk. In February, 1898, he made a strong and lucid statement to the *St. Louis Star*:—

“When I broke away, they said Mr. Wilson would be driven out of the business if money could accomplish it. Well, here I am, not a whit worse off for my experience. I have met with some difficulty in booking my attraction. One-night stands are more frequent. I don't always get into the first-class theatres. . . .

“Let Joseph Jefferson, Nat Goodwin, Billy Crane, Julia Marlowe, play at the Fourteenth Street Theatre. Would the people go to see counter attractions at the Olympic or Century in preference? . . .

“Actors are an emotional, impressionable, I might say shiftless, lot. . . . Nat Goodwin was going to build a chain of theatres from Portland, Oregon, to Portland, Maine, to fight the Trust. They offered him ten per cent more than he had usually been getting, and placed him in theatres he was anxious to reach. That put an end to his big talk.

“The idea of the Trust is to make one first-class and one second-class theatre in every city. One house gets all the heavy business. The other the lighter forms of comedy entertainment. What house gets the heavier business? The one controlled by members of the Trust. Messrs. Hayman and Davis, owning the Century, are not going to give the Olympic any the best of the St. Louis bookings. They are doing the same trick in Chicago and New York. After a while will come a different scale of prices for the two houses. There is where the Trust collar will rub.

“Next year Mrs. Fiske and Francis Wilson will not

be the only people outside the Trust. We can draw money, and every dollar we play to is a dollar out of the Trust's pockets. If we were half a dozen, instead of two, the end of the Trust would be in sight.

"As for inconvenience, it is slight. All it amounts to is our inability to get into a few cities. We can't touch Detroit, but I don't know that any one is consumed with a desire to play in Detroit. Newark is closed. I can't get into Philadelphia this year, but I will next season. There are Fourteenth Street theatres all over the country. Nobody that has a show the public wants to see need ask the Trust for permission to present it."

Well, Mr. Wilson, who could speak so sharply, was, it is understood, about the end of 1898 offered fifty thousand dollars for a half interest in his business by one of the firms comprising the Syndicate, Nixon and Zimmerman. He asked one night to consider the offer, and then accepted it. On January 2, 1899, the event was announced. His reasons, given to friends, were these:—

(1) The months of struggle had brought no new converts, and the strongest ally, Mansfield, had fallen by the wayside.

(2) There were no signs of the Trust's relenting or weakening.

(3) His following was slipping away, on account of the theatres he had to play in.

(4) His travelling expenses were greater.

(5) He had his family to consider.

In other words, he admitted that in a fight of a year and a half with the Syndicate he had been overwhelmingly defeated.

Mrs. Fiske then stood alone. If the Syndicate process of absorbing theatres goes on, she may be able to play in few American cities, but her hard and successful fight has added to her glory.

Such is the story up to the time of printing this book. It remains only to point out a few principles, most of them already indicated in the speeches of the rebellious actors.

I have taken a glimpse at the number of theatres controlled by the Trust. Let us now get some idea of the actors under the management of the firms comprising the Syndicate, or closely allied to it.

Sir Henry Irving, whose views have been quoted, toured America in 1900 under Charles Frohman's management. In that year Charles Frohman was either the controlling or the active manager of: William Gillette, John Drew, Annie Russell, Maude Adams, Julia Marlowe, Henry Miller—*The White Heather*; *Because She Loved Him So*, two companies; *At the White Horse Tavern*; *The Empire Stock Company*; *His Excellency, the Governor*; *Phroso*; *The Girl from Maxim's*; *Secret Service*; *The Cuckoo*; *The Little Minister*, No. 2; *Under the Red Robe*; *Zaza*, No. 2, with an interest in *Zaza*, No. 1.

His brother, Daniel Frohman, not a member of the Syndicate, but in such close relations with his brother that all his force can, in emergencies, be added to the power of the Trust, was then managing the tour of the Kendals. He also managed: E. H. Sothern, James K. Hackett, *The Daniel Frohman Stock Company; A Colonial Girl*.

Klaw and Erlanger managed the Rogers Brothers, who made much money, *Ben-Hur*, an enormous pecuniary success, and various other things. They got their principal power out of the fact that the whole Syndicate booking was in their hands, subject in part to the orders of Charles Frohman and the interests of other associates. Andrew Mack was managed by Rich and Harris, in close touch with the Syndicate.

Now, what of prominence, still taking the same year, was there outside, besides the one open enemy, Mrs. Fiske?

Several stars and companies, in whom the Trust had no direct interest or power, feared to incur in any way its displeasure. All, I believe, except Mrs. Fiske, played in Syndicate theatres part of the time.<sup>1</sup>


It will readily be seen that with only one star in revolt, a few neutral and submissive, and most

<sup>1</sup> Since then, at the beginning of 1901, Henrietta Crosman has begun a fight with the Trust, but it is too soon to calculate the results.

of the decidedly successful ones in practical control, the Syndicate added to its almost complete mastery of the playhouses an equally dominating influence over the players.

Although there are the two principal sources of power, there are others corollary in nature.

In their desire to influence the press, the members of the Syndicate are only like other managers. In their ability to do it, they are unrivalled. In New York, at least, it is not the obvious method, taken by smaller managers, of withdrawing advertisements. It is much subtler, in its essence like the deference which is always given to the very powerful. Their influence on any New York newspaper of the first class, even on the *Sun*, is probably not greater than Mr. Daly exercised on the *Tribune*. The fact that they have most of the news to distribute helps them enormously with papers which exist primarily for news. Their control of most of the plays gives them exceptional opportunities to pay dramatic critics to write and rewrite certain acts or plays, and to give opinions. A few newspaper men can be reached more directly, but not many. But all these things are incidental. The fundamental principle is that the king can do no wrong. It is the vague but strong desire to be "in it"—the tendency to treat with respect and caution any great power. This is a psychologi-



cal necessity. All the gossip, all the serious interests, of the world in which most dramatic critics breathe, centre in the doings of Mr. Frohman, his associates and dependants. Take an illustration. *Phroso* was one of the poorest melodramas given in New York for a long time; *The Conquerors*, one of the coarsest and dullest. *The Ghetto* was a rather strong play; *Children of the Ghetto*, an unusually strong one. The first two were highly praised and constantly talked about by the New York press; the last two were first attacked and then neglected. Had Charles Frohman produced the last two, he would have been praised for high ideals. Had Liebler & Co. produced the first two, they would have met one storm of condemnation, followed by silence. This is not venality. It is simply that the point of view is strict toward equals, reverential toward monarchs.

This power of the press is not easily exaggerated. Paragraphs all over the country, for a solid year, assured feverish attention to Maude Adams's *Juliet*. Any item about the intentions of Mr. Frohman is eagerly quoted everywhere. If he produced the worst play ever seen, it would hardly receive the abuse heaped upon Mr. Zangwill's drama. If he produced *Griffith Davenport*, the critics would shake themselves into alertness for its good points, whereas for Mr. Herne they expressed the sufferings caused by what they





deemed its dulness. Now, the New York papers are seen by perhaps twelve million people, including the newspaper men all over the country. A Syndicate attraction is put into New York just as soon as it has been "tried on the dog." It then becomes known through the land. A non-Syndicate production may have to wait a year or more before it can get into New York at all, and until it does, it loses the immense help of the New York press. Your man in Troy, with a salary of twelve dollars a week, is the type of the theatre-goer through the country. If he has three "shows" to choose from during a certain week, he spends his dollar on the one he has heard of. He would have heard of *The Christian* even had it never been in New York; but *Griffith Davenport* would be playing a dangerous game to go to such towns before a New York run had made the idea familiar. It would be deserted for the familiar names.


Think of the effect of this truth on new productions. Mr. Frohman can produce something and get the benefit of this immense advertising at once. Perhaps it is only some farce which loses money in New York, yet after it has been forced to run months there, it is so well known that it can at least go on the road to act as fair padding for the many theatres which have to be fed by the Syndicate in return for their submission. If anybody else produced such a failure, he

would be likely to lose what money he had. He couldn't keep time in New York. Klaw and Erlanger would not book him on the road. The outsider must succeed at once and succeed greatly, or the country is barred to him. This means practically that the man with a few thousand dollars, who is willing to help on a young star in whom he believes, or a play which he thinks good, in order to make a few thousand more, is helpless. He must aim only at overwhelming successes. He must gamble,—win all or lose all. Moderate returns are usually the reward of really high-class plays, so this situation means the survival of the mediocre.

The same conditions which make it difficult for new plays to gain a hearing, put obstacles in the path of an ambitious young actor, who wishes to star and has modest backing. Unless he makes a hit with great suddenness, he cannot get into enough good theatres to give him a season's work under favorable auspices. The surest way to-day for an American actor to become a star is to serve faithfully in the Frohman ranks until he is widely enough known to head a company; and this is a poor way, because he cannot then have a repertory, but at best one part a year. Where is the sense in a repertory, when more money can be taken in by one play, at far less expense?

This same principle is at work in the selection

of plays. Nothing does more than the existence of this powerful association to prevent the growth of the American drama. Charles Frohman, who almost alone supplies it with plays, avoids risk by accepting only dramas already tested abroad or the work of playwrights already established. The actor-managers are practically the only persons who produce the plays of untested Americans. Mrs. Fiske within a short time put on *Becky Sharp*, the first dramatic work of Langdon Mitchell, and *Little Italy*, by Horace Fry, until that time unknown, and just before that, *Tess*, made by Lorimer Stoddard, then little known, and *Love Finds the Way*, adapted from the German by Marguerite Merrington, whose reputation was very slight. Mr. Crane and Mr. Goodwin also have their eyes open for American work. Mr. Frohman and his associates have almost a corner in the plays of foreigners and of the established American authors. The ease with which they put No. 2 companies on the road gives the playwright greater royalties. Their domination of the theatres gives him better time and longer runs. They have greater influence with the public. Mr. Frohman has the reputation of absolute honesty in his accounts and of uncommon generosity, not universal qualities among theatrical managers. For these reasons, anybody not at peace with the Syndicate would probably



find it hard to secure a play by Barrie, Jones, Pinero, Gillette, or Fitch; and George Bernard Shaw has frankly expressed his unwillingness to displease that aggregation. For the same reasons, an unknown author with a good drama would need to look elsewhere, and his only hope would be, that he had, not a worthy play, but one capable of making a sensation immediate and unmistakable, so that after a few nights or weeks, with or without giving up an interest in it, dates could be procured from Klaw and Erlanger. Even then the worst dates might be given, if the interest was not shared; but the distribution of dates is of little importance with a sensational success, though it may mean life or death to a play of which the drawing power is moderate.

The actor has advantages and drawbacks somewhat corresponding. Like the playwright, if he be in favor with the Syndicate, he can have constant employment and prompt pay, and he is, therefore, naturally often willing to take a smaller salary than he would accept from an outside manager. Like the playwright, he is not called upon for the higher qualities. Charles Frohman, with the multitude of actors under his control, would have difficulty in casting a really great play. When he bent all his resources for months to the success of *Romeo and Juliet*, in the spring of 1899, the result, compared to what Mr. Con-

ried could do with a German classic, with his own company, in three weeks, or even to what Mr. Sothern or Mr. Mansfield have done with Shakespeare, was amateurish, and the acting in *L'Aiglon* was wretched. It is doubtful whether, with hundreds of actors to draw from, he could have put on *Becky Sharp* as well as Mrs. Fiske did, or *Griffith Davenport* as well as Mr. Herne did—each vastly limited in choice by the monopoly. The power of the combine, of which he is the producing head, makes for mediocrity in acting as in plays. A play in an unexplored field must rely almost wholly upon the actor-managers, and a drama which rose into the highest tragic or comic greatness would find harder obstacles the higher it stood. As a rule, also, the best things done here, as the *Tyranny of Tears* and *Trelawny of the Wells*, are copied in almost every detail of the production from the foreign presentation. The Syndicate managers, however, do not try to reproduce the successes of Sudermann, Hauptmann, or Ibsen, or to encourage in any way the sterner aspects of the drama in America. They dread anything austere and tragic. It means to them the same as unpleasant or dull. Obviously, therefore, actors are kept from showing talent in some higher lines as surely as are playwrights.

Nor, even within the limitations set by the Syn-

dicade taste, does an actor stand quite on his own merits. A player in favor with one of the leading powers in the Trust has many of the advantages of the favorite of a king. He, or let us say she, will receive more attention in the press. Seldom will conflicting attraction be found in the towns while she is there. She may extend her time and throw out other bookings. Her rivals will be prevented from doing this. Time will be held generously for her, and if she is unsuccessful, cheap companies can be dumped in to fill her time while she goes elsewhere. When Francis Wilson drew his cartoon of the Octopus, he labelled one scale "Special routes for our own attractions," and another "Impossible routes for outsiders." There is a sliding scale, even for their own attractions, according to their closeness to the throne. This is universal human nature, but its effects are increased by the combination.


The full text of the Syndicate agreement, signed in 1896 by the six parties to it, was put in evidence in a libel suit which Mark Klaw, representing himself and his associates, brought against Harrison Grey Fiske in the early part of 1898. The most important provisions in the agreement are these: —

"No attraction shall be booked in any of the said theatres or places of amusement (or in any which may be hereafter acquired as aforesaid) which will insist on

playing an opposition theatre or place of amusement in any of the cities above named (or any which may hereafter come under this agreement) unless the party hereto having the theatre or place of amusement in said competitive point shall give his or their consent in writing to permit said attraction to play in the opposition theatre or place of amusement.

"The parties hereto mutually covenant and agree that so far as the attractions owned by them respectively are concerned (or in which they may hereafter, during the continuance of this agreement, become interested) they will play the same in the theatres or places of amusement hereinabove mentioned (or hereinafter to be included), or they will remain out of the cities in which said theatres or places of amusement are respectively located. It is hereby understood and agreed that the respective parties hereto can only play any of their attractions in any opposition theatre or place of amusement if they obtain the written consent of the party hereto having a theatre or place of amusement in said competitive point."

As long as this agreement continues, and is successfully enforced by a group of men controlling most of the first-class theatres in the United States, their power will be absolute. This royal power, as I write, shows no signs of disintegrating. Many say that without Charles Frohman to feed the theatres with productions, the Trust would collapse. Others think that if Hayman, Klaw, or Erlanger should be taken away, the complicated business system would not be con-



tinued. Whatever may come to pass in the future, it is still true that this Syndicate can say to the theatre owner: "If you do not do business with us on our own terms, we will not let you have first-rate attractions. If you do, we will destroy your rival, or force him to the same terms. For the bookings we will take a share of the profits." To the actor or travelling manager it can say: "You must play in our theatres or in barns. For our theatres we make our own terms. We will show you contracts, but they will not be signed by us until the last moment, so that your bookings or terms may be changed at our convenience." To both they can say: "Nominally, we act as your agents. In reality, we are your absolute masters."






## CHAPTER II

### THE DRAMA OF IDEAS

A CONSPICUOUS branch, more in imported than in native plays, of what represents our intellectual drama, is loaded with the seriousness which marks an incomplete understanding, leading to an emphasis of analytic thought at the expense of beautiful forms. An attempt to distinguish sharply meaning from expression leads, for instance, to contrasts between Shakespeare's brilliant rhetoric and his "commonplace" conceptions. Of three of the most notable dramatic critics in England one puts Shakespeare just above Ibsen, one places him infinitely below the Norwegian, and the third wobbles unsteadily from this atmosphere to a place from which beauty and truth are seen as one. Contemporary dramatists are naturally treated to a similar if less vehement confusion. *The Princess and the Butterfly* and *Trelawny of the Wells* were patronized where *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was admired, because the earlier play can be expounded more readily in the form of  $(a + b)^2 = a^2 + 2ab + b^2$ . It has more of that meaning which the mathematician missed



in *Paradise Lost*. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* had to be dramatized because it was so significant, while so much higher a piece of art as *Far from the Madding Crowd*, whatever its relation to an earlier Pinero play, is half forgot. Yet, although Mr. Pinero and Mr. Hardy are treated most respectfully when their tone is most serious, their touch is delicate only when it verges on comedy. If we applied to them not philosophic but artistic standards, the relative reputations of their principal works would be reversed.

In *Tess*, as in much of Ibsen, the serious effects are studied and tricky, things go wrong by complicated accident, there is none of the exhilaration of tragedy through a freeing of the imagination. In the same play the rustic scenes, where comedy predominates, are large and easy, with a consistency of character that gives them unity. Mr. Pinero, also, in his solemn dramas, plays on the nerves rather than on the imagination, which he often reaches with his lighter touch. Whatever he has got from Ibsen has not improved his native English talent. *The Princess and the Butterfly* and *Trelawny of the Wells*, like some of his earlier comedies, are laid out, whatever their imperfections, in a broad and roomy spirit. If the author has ceased to mistake problematic dulness for depth, as his last three plays hint, he is likely to lengthen his list of charming works,

because the ideas of Pinero the artist are worth so much more than the syllogisms of Pinero the moralist. In philosophy and science it may be possible to separate success of thought from exhilaration and joy, but in art it is not. No literature, and least of all the drama, has any higher aim than the production of imaginative delight. "My lord," exclaims Fay Juliani, "'e bored me till I felt my scalp quivering. Do you know dat feeling?" That emotion is not an artistic one. "Perhaps," says the Princess in the same play, "it is to the advantage of a clever man's seriousness that it should be lighted up occasionally, just to show what it is composed of."

A dramatist's seriousness must always be lighted up enough to show, not only what it is composed of, but the inspiration and human value of its parts. The neglect of the dress of beauty is what makes some of Ibsen's plays rather technical experiments, instructive to playwrights, than forms precious to humanity. No spider's arguments against sweetness and light will enable us to produce art without it. Ibsen is a great playwright, because he is a poet, and because he is always a distinguished workman; but what success he has is in spite of his infatuation with sociology and heredity, which tend to dim that bare but vivid imagination which gleams even through his restricting tensity. In his later

plays the philosophic are far below the technical ideas — the manner in which the action is carried forward with relentless quietness and unhesitating power, with few incidents, the early acts developing from within, marching onward as if with the strength of the conception, and falling apart to show the corrupting thesis only toward the end. The end is what shows most fatally whether the playwright has builded on the sand of theory or the rock of imagination. Ibsen sees the situation, he sees part of the characters, in exposition he shows rare talent, but as he often has no great fables to tell, he breaks down in the last act and substitutes mystery, with a compulsory pistol-shot, for large clearness and the broad end of a big story.

Nothing shows better than endings the difference between ideas which lie inside of art and those which cannot be amalgamated with it. Lessing long ago complained of plays which end like an epigram. Some of Ibsen's do that, because the conceptions which he is expounding are syllogisms. They hold us down to the point, contracting our feelings, instead of expanding them, and any large view of life expands them, whether it be tragedy or comedy. One of the greatest wrongs commonly done to Shakespeare is in the excision of the endings. When Hamlet dies, the curtain falls, implying no interest in the total

meaning of the play (though Mr. Forbes Robertson and Mr. Sothorn have been more intelligent in this matter); and when Romeo and Juliet are dead, the large conclusion of the story is looked upon as an impertinence. In the case of Shakespeare and other poetic dramatists, this mutilation is due to the vanity of actors and the mediocrity of audiences, but your concocter of intellectual dramas snaps off his story, with no need of help from the manager, because it is one line of thought, narrowly followed out, not a picture needing to be completed with the majestic strokes with which it was begun.

Another inartistic idea, which prides itself on being modern, is lowering the dignity of the protagonist. Hedda Gabler, a nervous egotist, who mistakes her sensitiveness for superiority, and pines for a life in which men get drunk and shoot themselves through the temple, instead of through the abdomen, is apt for comedy, but Ibsen has placed her in the centre of a sober drama, and, by a law which will exist as long after his death as it existed before his birth, his play would be ruined by this error alone. It is possible, though by no means certain, that the thought which was wasted in the creation of Hedda might have adorned a neurologist or surgeon, just as it is conceivable, but still less probable, that economic genius lurks in the mind

which conceived *Widowers' Houses* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. The law that a tragedy cannot exist unless the author glorifies life, unless he puts magnified characters in ideal situations, working out exceptional plots, was created not by Aristotle, but by the nature of the human mind; and a law which has stood the test of time, from Sophocles to Shakespeare, and from Racine to Goethe, will not yield to theories of novelty. If the contemporary drama neglects it, the law remains, and the drama is condemned.

Intellectual realism, which denies the tested laws, is farther from truth than the veriest melodrama. Zola's manifestoes stand fairly enough for the notions of his tribe. He is talking of *Macbeth*:—

"This is indifferent to me, because it happens too far from me, in the clouds. And the interpretation baffles me still more. I write that it is sublime, but I remain cold. Perhaps a sense is lacking to me. I was mortally bored at *Macbeth*, and left with no distinct opinion of Salvini. In *La Mort Civile* Salvini transported me; I went away choking with emotion. To be sure the author of the last drama, M. Giacometti, should not hope to equal Shakespeare. His work, at bottom, is even mediocre, in spite of the charming bareness of his formula. But it is of my time, it moves in the air I breathe, it touches me like the story of a neighbor. I prefer life to art, as I have often said. A great work frozen by centuries is in truth no more than a beautiful corpse."

Does not all that sound to us to-day like the talk of a sophomore? More hopeful than this are the gods in the gallery, who are open to greatness, however open they also are to vulgarity. Although the public is a monster, the voice of the people is the voice of God, and the gallery will protect us from mystery, surgery, and problems.

We need not flatter the intelligence of this protecting *vox populi*. When we think of the subtleties of the pseudo-intellectual drama, unintelligible and valueless to the unsophisticated imagination, we hail the public as a friend; but when we dwell with the uncouth object which the manager means when he snarls, "That's what the public wants, and you will find a hard job if you try to elevate it," our refuge is withdrawn. The people are loyal to some of the deepest rules of art, because those principles were founded on a knowledge of human nature; but although they maintain the rights of flesh and blood, their blood and their flesh are as coarse as they are vigorous. To take an illustration from another art: some old soldiers objected to a monument in which war was represented by Pallas. What had that dead Greek woman to do with the battle-field? An artist replied that they would be satisfied by a group in which one soldier cut off the head of another with his sabre, especially if red paint on

the marble recalled blood. The desire for art of the present was healthy, but the expression which they would choose would be the coarsest. In the drama their taste is similar. You cannot swing the crowd off after Maeterlinck, and you can count on the gallery for enthusiasm over Shakespeare; but on the other hand, it is with his situations, his theatrical element, that Shakespeare holds them, not with his subtler beauty, and they applaud loudest the interpolations of Garrick and Cibber. They like a good, honest, human Philistine better than Mr. Gilbert or Mr. Pinero. The names of the most popular plays of to-day are hardly known to those of us who read. They all deal with love and intrigue, villains, heroes, and the supremacy of virtue, and the language in them is stilted and loud. Not everything which the public likes is good art, but nothing which

✕ the public dislikes is great art. Successful art must deal with important material, and it must mould it into beautiful forms. The public is the great judge of the material only, and a poor judge of the form. If your subject-matter, your theme, your sentiment, your ethics, do not please the crowd, you are slight. If they do, you may succeed for the day; but to succeed for the centuries this common human material must have delicacies and harmonies of form which can be appreciated by few. The tendency of some of the most intel-



lectual dramatists of to-day is to refuse large human demands to the crowd and harmonies to the sensitive, asking all to be content with a little psychology.

These plays are weakest intellectually where they are weakest dramatically. Mr. Shaw made a fuss because the American public didn't like that scene in *The Devil's Disciple*, where a minister becomes a soldier in about four seconds, rushes around the room making speeches, but lacks time to kiss his wife or say anything that would expose the plot. The public talks in terms of morals and metaphysics, but behind its words is usually a perception of technical or imaginative weakness. Mr. Shaw didn't know how to make a good story or an efficient character. *Arms and the Man* would have succeeded had it possessed dramatic consistency and completeness. The public liked *The Little Minister*, and there is more skill in it than in the whole work of many playwrights who pretend to a place just ahead of the age. There is no superfluous word, scene, or movement, no excrescence and no self-consciousness, but a steady movement carries the story directly, with a delicate, artificial, and yet human touch, through devices as fresh as they are moderate. The comedy line just this side of farce is followed with an unerring ability which makes the play — cheerful, easy, and distinct — as charming

to the simple as it is to the shrewd. Mr. Barrie in this play shows the ripe ideas of an artist, not the half-baked material of speculation.

Mr. Barrie has enjoyed the happiness of being allowed to write comedy without having unlimited meaning instilled into it, but Mr. Pinero has not been so fortunate. Although the mood of *The Princess and the Butterfly*, its liberal structure and subdued humor, are its merits, everybody discussed the *pros* and *cons* of unseasonable marriage, and a comedy of the intelligence was turned into tragedy, sentiment, and sermons, by lovers of melancholy philosophy. Volumes of Teutonic gravity have been written about the inner meaning of Falstaff; and at least one individual did, in his earlier days, find an almost tragic significance in that song in *Patience* which recounts how a magnet, wooed by all the nails and files in the shop, was unable to attract the only thing it loved, a silver churn. Because Gilbert's wit cut into life, the aforesaid victim then thought it ought to be explained in essays as serious as life. It really seemed unworthy of it to call it wit, lest somebody forget that wit deals with realities. How does *Le Gendre de M. Poirier* suggest treatises on social conditions! When Yvette Guilbert went to Germany, the Teutons found morals in her songs, and even a Frenchman, writing of her, said: "I find our Yvette a moralist. I breathe

in her songs the healthy, bitter odor of the forests, bitter as the suffering of life, healthy as pity for all the conquered."

That this weakness can be traced far into the past may be suggested by the title of a play (quoted by Faguet) by Pierre Matthieu, in the sixteenth century : —

"Vashi, tragédie . . . ou l'on verra les tristes effets de l'orgueil et désobéissance, la louange d'une monarchie bien ordonnée, l'office d'un bon prince pour heureusement commander sa puissance, son ornement, son exercice éloigné du luxe et dissolution, et la belle harmonie d'un mariage bien accordé."

However old this spirit may be, its most influential modern appearance was in the fertile brain of Denis Diderot, who not only dramatized his sermons, but loudly proclaimed his belief that plays were the best medium for instilling philosophic truth into the multitude, and even for the government to prepare the public for changes in the law, an idea now dwelling in the mind of William of Germany. A better dramatist has said that art teaches all in aiming to teach none, and he might have added that it teaches much only when it aims to teach nothing — when it aims at the emotions, the passions, and the imagination, and not at the logical reason or the sense of scientific fact. It was this same dramatist who made

M. Poirier admire the picture of a dog sitting on a sea beach, baying across the nightly billows. The dog comes nearer to the grand style and the universal than does the *tranche de la vie*. Virtue harassed and triumphant, incidents galore, and villains persistent and routed, are nearer the heart of drama than is an intellectual study where there is no virtue and no villain, no incidents and no exaggerations, nothing but a plea that we be interested in apothecaries or the subtleties of domestic discord. Melodrama is poetry in the rough, and the realism preached by Diderot and practised at intervals since his day is the antithesis of poetry in any state. If the crowd could get great art it would take it; but, as it is, it takes the next best, which is not syllogistic plays, but melodrama, in which there is a human appeal, not only to the general, but to the civilized, man also. The kinship between intellectual innocence and real culture is what makes bad melodramas so good and good melodramas so bad. Usually the man who enjoys Pinero or Barrie thoroughly is the man who rejoices in a howling picture of love and hate and hairbreadth 'scapes, with virtue and sentiment glorified in the end. The civilized man enjoys the primitive instincts of mankind and dislikes the pretences of half-education. The ragged man and woman who throb over the wild eyes and dishevelled hair of the heroine are his brother and

sister. He feels, as they do, a thrill in his inmost being when the curtain falls on the first "I love you." He feels nothing at all to correspond with the tastes of the class just above these things — the middle class, which knows enough to scorn *A Bowery Girl*, but buys literature for the chromos which go with it, and goes to the theatre to see cartloads of scenery and acres of heather, and real horses. This is the class on whose integrity and stability modern civilization rests, but its taste in art is worse than the taste of those above it or of those below it. To this class, also, the manager who wishes to give the people what they want must look, for they have as much money as the cultivated, and are almost as numerous as the poor.

Mr. William Gillette once said that the only critic whose opinion he respected was the average spectator, who is, unfortunately, unable to express his opinion. In keeping the appeal to fundamental interests, which the melodrama has, and substituting good workmanship for bad, the author of *Secret Service* and *Sherlock Holmes* has made two of the best plays recently produced in the United States. The well-made piece, as it is represented by Sardou, is a spectacle even more melancholy than the problem play. It differs from the proper melodrama in causing a merely nervous excitement, instead of playing on the

varied emotional sources of laughter, sympathy, and tears. The theatrical side is a vital part of every great drama, but the theatrical side itself in Sardou is depraved. Although Shakespeare and Molière live through the centuries because they are literature, they hold the stage because they are theatrical. Although they are full of intricate charms that can best be felt in the closet, their appeal to the eye is equally strong. Their scenes and situations are almost as far above Sardou as their language and psychology. Just as the callow intellectual dramatist tries to push into conspicuousness his fragment of the life that should go into a play, so the disciple of the "well-made play" fathered by Scribe tries to do everything with his one fraction of stage workmanship. All the elements combine in the great dramatists, and all that is done by the playwrights who make a specialty of one aspect is to give extreme emphasis to the only thing they have among the many things which hold their place in the proper high or low relief in more opulent dramatists. The psychological playwright has taken off one end, the dramatic mechanic another. There is more stagecraft in Sardou than there is in Molière, only in the sense that there are more ideas in Ibsen than there are in Shakespeare; that in the smaller men the thing they have is more emphatic than it could be if it did not stand alone. Intelli-

gently speaking, the whole theatre of Sardou is as much below *Hamlet* in stagecraft as all of Ibsen is below it in intellectual content.

We are probably farther from a revival of tragedy than from either comedy or what Victor Hugo called the "grotesque." It was a sadly demoralized man who said he had three rules for the conduct of life; of which the first was, never to see the plays of Henry Arthur Jones, and the other two did not matter: but it was an artist also and a critic who spoke. The bourgeois dramas, loaded with easy sentiment, are farther from health in one direction than those of the perpetrator of the jest, the brilliant author of *A Woman of No Importance* and *Lady Windermere's Fan*, are in the other. Of course only part of Mr. Jones's widely differing plays rests on sentimental morality. There seems to be more hope of tragedy on the Continent, where *Die Versunkene Glocke*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *L'Aiglon*, and perhaps even *El Gran Galeotto*, support the prophecy so often made recently, especially in France, that the day has passed alike for well-built machines and slices of life, and that the world is learning over again that for its serious plays it must depend upon the poets. In years there has been no such welcome to a poetic play by cultivated Frenchmen as has been received by *Cyrano* and *L'Aiglon*. Victor Hugo had, like all but a few of his country-

men, more sentiment than tragic passion, and there has really been no tragedy of the highest kind since *Faust*. The explanation that the world has grown away from poetry is, perhaps, disposed of by the fact that no mind was ever more filled with the messages of science than Goethe. Although science may have added nothing to the material of imagination, it has destroyed nothing, but, like other absorbing interests, it suffers from offences committed in its name. Poetic tragedy will survive Darwin as easily as it survived Newton and Copernicus. *Die Versunkene Glocke* was an immense popular success in Germany. The greatest literary ideas are dramatic ideas; most of the world's highest literature is poetry, and most of its highest poetry is drama. We need not fear that modern times are undramatic, for artistic genius is creative, and when it exists it will create somewhat in its universal manner.

Creative plays scatter in passing maxims the kind of truths of which one is distended into a philosophic drama. There are enough generalizations in *Lear* or *Tasso* to give themes to a library of intellectual plays, but they are unessential fragments in their place, strewn along the path of their main conception, which is larger than any abstract proposition. The greatest artistic ideas which the human mind ever con-



ceives are fables. *Wallenstein* and *Othello* start from the story, and general statements spring from it; while in the problem dramas the generalization is made first and the facts invented, so that the plot instead of being the grandest conception of the race, is at best what one man can do. None of the greatest plays has a plot invented wholly by the author. They tell a story which irradiates truth in many directions, while the piece which is constructed to fit a proposition is concentrated in the proof of the notion on which it started. It would not be difficult to write out in a few sentences the meaning of *L'Ami des Femmes*, *A Doll's House*, *The Devil's Disciple*, or *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*, but it would be as absurd to ask what is the meaning of *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, or *Iphigenia*, as it would be to sum up the story and character of Julius Cæsar in a proposition. Great dramatic ideas are imaginative and emotional conceptions, and the nearest to an exact abstract statement that can be made about them will tell what feeling of life they imbue. Nobody who felt life greatly could deem *Troilus and Cressida* a better drama than *Othello*, as one British playwright and recently retired critic does, finding its superiority in its comparatively dingy and paltry motives, which he thinks make it worthy of the nineteenth century. He wants nothing imitated in the drama

except what he is capable of fully comprehending. He is like the people at whom La Bruyère laughed for admiring pictures of things, when in the things themselves they saw nothing interesting.

As the principal part of any large moral or artistic idea is old, it being an accumulation and not a rapid birth, the greatest dramatists of one age are more like those of another period than they are like smaller ones nearer their own time. Sophocles has more essentially in common with Shakespeare than he has with Voltaire. Comedy has a more changing aspect, but the sublime differs little from century to century. It is now as true as it was when Aristotle wrote, that many men can make scenes, and many can even make characters, but none but the rare genius can handle a plot. "Fate makes greater tragedies than playwrights," says Echegaray. The great poet accepts largely the work of fate. He alone can tell a great story so that it keeps all of its greatness. He accepts the facts, and emphasizes them. Far from showing that there are no entirely good men and none entirely bad, he makes his heroes more heroic than nature and his villains blacker than life. In love he tells most often of the first, not because it is more important or exists more certainly than later and more conscious love, but because it is more dramatic. *Romeo and Juliet*

can be the centre of a tragedy, but to make the loves of Antony and Cleopatra sublime, they need to be set in a drama of the nations.

The great dramatic truths are clear. Nothing is more impotent in art than the vague and mysterious suggestions attempted by playwrights who rejoice in entangling qualities of character instead of clarifying them. The playwright who accumulates motives, and thinks he is not bound to give them any more consistency than they have in life, is no dramatist. Shakespeare threw Caliban upon the earth, alive. Renan wrote a philosophic and symbolic play about part of him, Browning wrote a lengthy poem about another aspect of him, Shakespeare simply made him speak and act. Commentators talk about what he stands for. Whatever he means, there he is, clear and complete. Are the dramatic ideas in *The Tempest*, or in *Caliban*, and *Caliban upon Setebos*? People discuss to this day whether Hamlet was mad, yet he is as real and distinct to us as he would be if he lived, and probably Lear has told the world more about insanity than any treatise. These pictures are clear, not because the plays are about insanity, for they are not; but because they disentangle from the mass of reality in the universe two stories carried on by characters of enlarged proportions, that we all can see, and it happens that among these characters are a young

man whose mind sometimes reels with the swaying of the world, and another man whose old brain crumbles with the battering of destiny. The truth of genius is clear, and the truth of science is clear also, but in another way, an abstract way, that cannot be reconverted into dramatic life. The witches and ghosts of Shakespeare — Ariel, Caliban, and Puck — are as much alive as Brutus or Cressida. This imaginative distinctness cannot exist without beauty, for the imagination is largely reached through the senses. It is in vain that we try to lower the story, the persons, or the words, to actual life. If we do so, seeking scientific accuracy, we lose the clearness we had, since that kind of truth cannot be derived from beauty. Poets are men who see emotional truth with sureness and express it with its own charm, which is conveyed through the harmonies of words and images. As Longinus has it, "Beautiful words are the very light of thought." The only ideas of value in tragedy are the ideas whose light is beauty.

In comedy the fixed laws are more in the spirit of our time. Even strong tragedy sometimes stirs the public to-day, but with us good comedy has a wider hearing, since, while tragedy is general, comedy can paint those details of contemporary life for which the English-speaking public now have such an appetite. The audience for

comedy has always been largest, and the increase of education and the consequent heterogeneity of audiences may well increase the difference. That sadder knowledge of mankind which is given by tragic art can never be valued by the whole people as highly as special information about ourselves lighted by universal truth, which is the substance of the higher comic drama. Again, the fact that successful tragedy can exist only in verse gives an advantage to comedy in an age addicted to prose, though American and British dramatic poets may yet arise to rival Hauptmann and Rostand, and the interest aroused by Mr. Stephen Phillips has been very strong. The exhilaration which any art must give, and which is accomplished by the tragic poet through beauty of language, imagery, and verse, and through breadth and idealization of characters and action, in comedy springs from the intellectual mirth aroused by a distinct and easy exhibition of the foibles of mankind set in grotesque situations, varying, even at its height, from the gentle irony of *Tartuffe* to the rollicking burlesque of *Bar-dolph*, *Pistol*, and *Nym*, but always appealing partly to the reason, until it descends to empty farce, where, whether it be in the *Two Dromios* or in *The Private Secretary*, the amusement is immediate and wholly independent of reasonable ideas. Probably the greatest comedy is that which

combines the immediate broad absurdity of farce with deep psychology, as in Falstaff and *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, rather than that which is shown through characters like those of *Le Misanthrope* and *Les Femmes Savantes*, which, without meaning more to the trained intelligence, escape the uncultivated. Whether, however, comedy be broad or fine, so long as it escapes farce, it is critical, and therefore probably the most natural dramatic medium for expressing an age of analysis and common sense; but, as it is art, this expression must fill even scientific fact and reasonable criticism with enjoyment and content. No art is great unless by it we are released from care and taught to extract pleasure from our human limitations. Had a tragedian handled *Mrs. Tanqueray*, the public might have called it sad but never disagreeable. Had it been the theme of a pure comedian, the strain would be relaxed, fresh air thrown into its atmosphere, and joy taken in the free play of the author with his creatures, when he is picturing them as they are and not bending every nerve to suggest what they should be. Although there can be no logical proof that serious propagandism cannot instil life into a drama, there is the firmer demonstration of experience. *Mrs. Tanqueray* is encumbered by its thesis, while *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, exhibiting and not arguing, changed the face of a society.



## CHAPTER III

### OUR TWO ABLEST DRAMATISTS

THERE is a drama, not large, but distinct, which belongs especially to the United States of to-day, and, whether lasting or not, to contemporary observers seems to move on more artistic principles than any native plays of the past. Two men stand, as far as we can see, clearly ahead of their predecessors: James A. Herne, for intellectual qualities, supported by considerable stagecraft; William Gillette, for the playwright's talents, working on ideas of his own. Their plays are equalled by single efforts of other men, but no other American dramatist has done as much of equal merit.

My first experience of Mr. Herne dates back a decade, when, in a little Boston hall, ill adapted to the drama, a small audience, composed of literary men, Harvard professors, and students, was thrown into enthusiasm by *Margaret Fleming*. To go back so far transcends this story of the current drama, but, in the hope that *Margaret Fleming* may some day see the stage again, I wish at least to mention it.

Mrs. Herne played, with poignant conviction, a wife, who learned of her husband's infidelity at the death-bed of his mistress, whither she had gone in charity. Her sight, which was affected by nervous strain, now failed entirely. Understanding that she would never forgive him, he departed, his business collapsing at the same time. He had misunderstood her, however, for although she did not expect to ignore the wrong, her conception of the just solution was for them to raise his illegitimate child, together to face the world in their native town, and together to pay his business obligations. The plot, obviously, is not remarkable. The simplicity, freshness, and power of the scenes and words were what made to our little Harvard audience an artistic revelation. Mr. Herne himself acted a good-humored and characterless adventurer, who is barely sketched in the written play, and would be difficult for any future actor to re-create; if, indeed, this and the author's other dramas are published, as they ought to be for the future's gain, although they are written only in "stage literature," to be filled out by the actor.


*Margaret Fleming* is not unlike some recent German plays in texture and inspiration; but it was performed before those continental dramas were familiar to Mr. Herne or to the small and excited audience which welcomed his endeavor.



With *Griffith Davenport* it has a spiritual distinction which places the author in a class alone among our playwrights. *Shore Acres* came in between, a popular success, and a fine play, and, although it did not aim as high as its predecessor and its next follower, it stands first among American rural dramas.

In 1899 *Griffith Davenport* was tried and condemned by the public, after it had been enthusiastically praised by some of the foremost dramatists and critics. The voice of the people was unmistakable. Mr. Howells suggested that the explanation might be found in the diminished public interest in slavery. About the ethical and socialistic problem in the abstract the people are doubtless indifferent; but a struggle between personal associations and private conviction is dramatic, and the failure to awaken general interest in Mr. Herne's drama must have grown less from the subject than from its treatment.

Among plays dealing with the American Civil War, of which the most notable preceding ones were *Held by the Enemy*, *Shenandoah*, and *Secret Service*, *Griffith Davenport* is the most explicitly intellectual, its virtue to the few, its sin to the multitude. Even to the thoughtful spectator, excellent speeches by negroes are hurt by too great length, a long disquisition on slavery is felt to be



unsuited to the theatre, and the Southern drawl is too much insisted on. Here the few and the many are at one, but in other respects their conflict is sharp. To the few the drama is calm, delicate, and moving; to the many it is tiresome. The comic relief, which is so inevitable and almost always so empty in American plays, is at a minimum here, though even in reduced quantities it jars in contrast to the elevation of the serious parts.


The first scene shows a plantation with a quarrel among the negroes, bringing out the contempt of the happy slaves of an amiable mistress for the despised free niggers, and also marking, with a trifle too much emphasis, divisions in the family, the father's sympathies being against the "inhuman traffic," the mother's in favor of the "peculiar institution," and one of the sons following each parent. "If I ever get a chance to hit that thing," says the minister, in the apocryphal words of Abraham Lincoln, "I will hit it hard." Just the proper contrast to the joyous life of the Davenport negroes is given by the episode of a slave escaped from a neighboring plantation, captured before the audience by a brutal master; and an admirable suggestion of the intricate difficulties of the situation is made by the plea of a slave to Davenport to buy her husband, lest his master sell him far away, so that the preacher's

hatred of such traffic finally bends enough to save one woman's happiness.

After an argument in the second act comes a splendid scene of the freeing of Mrs. Davenport's slaves, an inspiring piece of refined and varied dramatic art. Some of the negroes are indignant at being forced to be free niggers, some wholly dead to any meaning in the ceremony. One asks his mistress to take care of his manumission papers for him, as he has no idea what to do with them; and one thinks freedom means sleeping later in the morning. A striking contrast is again neatly introduced by the suicide of an escaping slave and his master's cry, "There goes \$1500." By the end of the third act Davenport is forced by his neighbors, who are infuriated by the signs of Lincoln's election, to fly to Washington.

The fourth act is wholly made up of one scene, unsurpassed, as far as my experience goes, for high dramatic elements, in any American drama. It is the quiet, powerful exhibition of one moral situation, the working out of a law in visible terms, the resistance to the call of bitter duty and the final surrender. The governor of Indiana wishes Davenport to lead the Army of the Potomac into Virginia. The Southern preacher's heart cannot hold such a thought. The governor shows him the best map in the possession of the

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Northern government. Carried away by his interest, the old man runs his finger over it, wondering at its faults, exclaiming that it would be a death-trap for any army to follow such a guide, showing minute intimacy with every stream and ridge. Brought back to the question by the governor, he still refuses. He has seen McDowell's retreat. Will he let another slaughter be the result of his refusal? Will he lengthen out the war by months and years? He refuses. The governor leaves a peremptory order, signed A. Lincoln, on the map and departs. The old man sits and thinks. His wife enters and hears the story from one of the sons. Surely he will not go, she thinks. Yes, he will. Then she will go back to her people in the South. Still he will go. The loving old husband closes the door, and the curtain falls on a scene that belongs to the very highest regions yet entered by American dramatic art.

The first half of the last act has the conventional element of a capture of the minister by his Confederate son, after the Union army has been saved by him, but the closing scene takes again the noble height of the preceding act. The husband and wife meet in the twilight, on the steps of the old plantation. They have had cruel differences, but as they talk together, and compare their impressions of Lincoln, they float back into the past, the pains are cured, and their lives come

together in a few words of exquisite delicacy. The end of the play is peace, high peace, like the end of *Shore Acres*, but given with even more charm. If the world condemns *Griffith Davenport* to oblivion much will be lost, and we can only lament, in the words of Sheridan, "I fear very much that people go to the theatre *to be amused*."

If all of *Sag Harbor*, Mr. Herne's latest drama, were as good as the last act, it would deserve to stand among those few plays which have placed him so high. Unevenness in quality, however, lack of single motive, and consequent thinness, make it inferior to *Shore Acres*, and it does not pretend to be in the same class with *Margaret Fleming* and *Griffith Davenport*, as, the more serious the subject, the better shows this author. As Mr. Herne could never write a play without allowing the distinction of his mind and taste to appear, at least in flashes, there are bits in *Sag Harbor* that are charming both in humor and in earnest. Mr. Herne is at his best as a critic of life; and *Sag Harbor* looks as if he had set about the construction of a popular drama with a certain local atmosphere, without having a story to tell, a character to present, or one strong mood to create. Nobody, however, but a true dramatist ever makes his last act the best, and if *Sag Harbor* had all its

vital parts presented in two acts it might be finer, but probably would be less successful.


The play opens with one of those genre pictures, drawn with a free and bold hand, in which Mr. Herne has always shown talent. The first two acts drag in spots, however, and the story which threads the touches of life is a perfunctory one from the theatrical arsenal — a girl marrying a man, when she loves another, out of a misunderstanding and gratitude. Some comical scenes, especially one of general mild intoxication, are written with a knowledge of stage needs, but they are too much elaborated and quite unrelated to the flashes of finer metal in the play. The third act is always made livelier in these four-act domestic comedies, and the dramatic situation in this case is the discovery by the husband, after two years of marriage, that his wife has loved his younger brother. For twenty years he has been all kindness, but now, in her hour of greatest need, he spurns her. They all seem to be aground, as the old captain says, and can only wait for the tide.

The tide rises in the final act and rises beautifully. Mr. Herne, in a monologue, with all his troubled friends about him, tells their story as he sees it, and wins their happiness. This speech has the quality of literature, and it is followed by a revelation of approaching maternity made to the

wishing but unhopeful father, which is the finest scene on that subject that I have ever met.

Mr. Herne, and his rival in art, Mr. Gillette, have points of similarity as they have points of contrast. Both are actors, to remind us again that Molière was an actor-manager, that Shakespeare and his great contemporaries were nearly all practically busied with the theatre, and that in general good drama and practical theatrical experience are allied. Each of our American leaders has invented a special kind of acting, with few full expressions, relying on delicate and suggestive business, using calm effectively where commotion is expected; each writes his plays with his style of acting in mind; and each fits exactly into most of his leading rôles.

Of Mr. Gillette's numerous dramas the two last, with *Held by the Enemy*, are the most successful among those which can fairly be called original. In *Secret Service* Mr. Gillette carries the Civil War play, which he began with *Held by the Enemy* and Mr. Bronson Howard carried on with *Shenandoah*, to the highest point it has yet reached. In writing and acting alike Mr. Gillette reminds me of Mérimée: cold, yet producing feeling in the observer; apparently natural and disdainful of the theatrical, yet alert, active, and deeply theatrical every second. Using only his



head, he still touches the heart. His power of holding the stage is hardly to be surpassed. He never sticks out and he is never forgot. He enters quietly, perhaps stealthily, and you look at him. He seems to be doing nothing, but he is doing many things. He is taking certain attitudes and avoiding others, making a hundred subdued movements of his frame or head or face to reflect every change in the situation. He hardly ever lets down; never in his movements, only occasionally in his delivery. Most actors begin to act at one point, stop at another, begin again, and so alternate between life and death. To enact standing still successfully is one of the most difficult histrionic feats. Players who inexorably hold their audiences are—except in low comedy—by temperament incapable of relapse; and much of Mr. Gillette's power has come from his ability, as stage manager of his own plays, to train others to that silent swiftiness and calm intensity on which success in such plays depends, and in which Americans have done, on the average, their best histrionic work. This play has that inferiority of parts of the comic relief, which is so insistent with us; but, on the other hand, much of it is connected with the plot and is genuinely funny, and on the whole the drama, in this respect, surpasses almost all our pieces of the same class.



Will this play live? It is of a new species, not yet tested, which belongs more exclusively to the stage than the French well-made play, as exemplified in Dumas, Augier, or even Sardou, and it could hardly enter the library as a piece of literature unless it were written with some such skill as has gone into the best short stories. Its most remarkable scene, for instance, which takes place in a telegraph office, is a stunning piece of stagecraft, wonderfully acted by Mr. Gillette, but it evidently cannot be transferred to paper unless by the pen of a Maupassant or Stevenson. What will this growing tendency toward elaborate silent effects mean in the life of our plays? What would the silent closing scene of *Shore Acres* look like in a book? Or the powerful and largely silent fourth act of *Secret Service*? Can the taste of a day, for plays of one kind, be kept alive, unless people in after generations can read those dramas, and so call for their occasional performance? Would the *School for Scandal* or *She Stoops to Conquer* be revived if Sheridan and Goldsmith were never read?

Again, although in such acting as Mr. Gillette's Captain Thorne, combining coolness, humor, efficiency, and half-cynical seriousness into a typical American character, the realistic tendency shows at its best, fitting the play, it would be inadequate for tragedy or for large comedy. It suits plays

of exciting situations, and it suits farce, by the relief into which it throws the absurdity. Its method of handling sentiment is illustrated in Captain Thorne's speech to his sweetheart: "I'd like to say one thing — it's my last chance — perhaps you won't mind. You'll forget me, of course, that's right, that's best; I hope you will! But if memory should ever throw my shadow across your path again, perhaps you'll remember this, too. We can't all die a soldier's death, in the roar and glory of battle, our friends around us, under the flag we love, — no, not all. Some of us have orders for another kind of work — desperate, dare-devil work — the hazardous schemes of the Secret Service! We fight our battles alone — no comrades to cheer us on — ten thousand to one against us — death at every turn! If we win, we may escape with our lives; if we lose, dragged out and butchered like dogs — no soldier's grave — not even a trench with the rest of the boys, — alone — despised, forgotten! These were my orders, Miss Varney. This is the death I die to-night — and I am not ashamed of it."

Our best plays and our best actors rely on this absence of rhetoric, or this subdued rhetoric, whether it be in a war play or whether the heroism and pathos are mingled in the homely scenes of *Shore Acres*. In Mr. Herne, Mr. Gillette, Mr. Mansfield, and Mr. Drew, actors first in their lines,

this reliance on suggestion rather than full or over execution is seen. In spite of its frequent excellence, this style is never the highest, because of its insufficiency in the greatest plays. Although those actors have fewer faults than Ada Rehan and Sir Henry Irving, these finished realists cannot be identified with permanent characters; for an artist is measured by his highest reach, and it is the characters which make the actor, as it is his characters, and the plot which is part of them, which make the dramatist. Although in the direction of naturalness we have seen the most original native recent development of the histrionic art, it is worth while to remember that for a greater play we should need a greater acting style.

Mr. Gillette's *Sherlock Holmes* deserves to be treated as original, in marked distinction to most dramatizations of fiction, because it is, in the main, an independent play, requiring no knowledge of Dr. Doyle's stories, although a few things have been introduced as concessions to readers. In his workmanship he again showed himself the most adroit of American playwrights, by doing what could be accomplished by few men in any country. He took the good, honest old thrills of melodrama, and handled his material so skillfully that it sends shivers of delight up and down

the spinal chords alike of urchins and philosophers. All melodramas, one might be tempted to say, are good; but it may be doubted whether anything so uncompromisingly melodramatic has ever, at least in our day, been so well done. Certainly in many years nothing new approaching *Sherlock Holmes* in its sphere has been seen in America. Its whole-souled unreality, its generosity along the lines of heroism, impossibility, and villainy are princely. It wallows in incidents which we sophisticated persons should hardly care to narrate, except ironically, in the daytime. But at night, in the theatre, helped by the lights and the actors, and only slightly ridiculed by the presumably weird music of the orchestra, it takes you through realms that leave you clasping your chair and waiting with checked breathing for the solution of preposterous situations. "Things best please me when they befall preposterously," as Puck remarked. That genial critic would have had his body filled with happiness had he chanced into a box at the Garrick on the opening night of *Sherlock Holmes*. Perhaps he might have exhausted his own and his dramatic creator's genius without being able to collect any theoretical dogmas for his interest; but when he got into the street he would think to himself that some night he would go again.

In this detective drama it is a matter purely

and alone of stagecraft, and the way in which the playwright applied his tools to the perilous material was something to wonder at. The very idea of filling Broadway two-dollar audiences with an undiluted dose of lurid detective was a daring one. The difficulties seemed insuperable. The writer's avenues to escape from ridicule were closed. No felicity of language, no half suggestions, would avail. The events had to be seen right there in their gross absurdity. How could we imagine these marvellous and illogical deductions being taken seriously, these hair-breadth adventures carrying us with them, this paragon of insight not being a butt? It was all done, however; done by stage instinct and skill carried to the superlative degree. Mr. Gillette toyed with dangers that would have destroyed an average playwright.

How much or how little is taken from Dr. Doyle's stories matters little. The problem was not to invent incidents, but to select and use them. One fairly consecutive thread connects the episodes, one crime, bringing the detective into war with the king of the criminal world. The four or five main events which compose this story are chosen so that each one fits stage conditions perfectly, and ends in a theatrical climax. One of these climaxes is successfully violent, the shattering of a lamp and escape from the

gas chamber, but the others end on that subdued note with which Mr. Gillette knows so well how to soften the wilder improbabilities. Notably skilful is the final curtain, touching the inevitable human chord with such discretion that, instead of the softness that seemed imminent, the effect is one of sympathy. To have the seared man of tricks not only show the innocent girl all his perfidy, but to end the play with his reiterated declaration that to allow her to love him would be wickedness — a declaration growing sadder and lower, until it is murmured with her head on his shoulder — that is to accomplish the more than difficult feat of ending this strange and original medley on a human note without a discord.

One of the originalities of this drama is the abolition of the slowly and visible falling screen which does so much in many situations to chill and scatter the effect. It is in such mechanical contributions to stagecraft that Mr. Gillette has done some of his most original work. By this device of plunging the stage into sudden darkness, or of letting it fade slowly into darkness, according to the needs of the scene, and bringing it into light in the same manner, suddenly or by gradations, and having the curtain lowered when it cannot be seen, a decided gain is made, probably, for almost all kinds of dramas, certainly for those in which thrilling excitement is sought.

Of Mr. Gillette's many devices for commending such plays to intelligent theatre-goers, smothering the melodrama as it were, the leading one is moderation in expression. For instance, one act which has been full of wonders ends with the detective standing looking with humorous satisfaction at his office-boy, who has been one of his most efficient helpers. "Billy," he says, after a pause, "you are a good boy." Billy salutes. "Thank you, sir," he answers cheerfully, and the act ends on this note of playfulness. Throughout the drama the same device is used. Humor, disillusion, comradeship, come in whenever the unrealities grow too glaring, in order to subdue and excuse them.

Mr. Gillette made a speech, on the opening night of this drama, in which he expressed in a jesting manner some beliefs which seriously underlie his work.

"About a year ago," he said, "it seemed to me that the drama was insufficiently supplied with scoundrels. In former attempts at dramatic work I had endeavored to keep them out, but in this new light which broke upon me I saw that it was a serious mistake. Not only is it extremely unlikely and unlikelike that the twenty or so persons comprising the characters in a play could be found without at least twelve or fifteen bad people among them, but the exclusion of this criminal element is a grave financial error as well.

"The public likes them, and will pay liberally to

see them. The dramatist, as we all know, is not a student of the drama; he is a student of the public. He must learn what it likes and dislikes. As I have indicated, it likes villains—and it certainly ought to have them. If I ever write another play—which I quite agree with you in hoping I won't—I fully intend to make all the people in it desperate and annoying characters."

This attitude toward the public is the key-note of Mr. Gillette's practice. He hates talk about art. He never gets into the newspapers or into private conversation with ecstasies about ideals. He is calm, experienced, rather cynical. He knows his trade down to the ground. He has ideas also about life, but he uses them only so far as they fit strictly into his technical methods. As a practical dramatist he is a strange combination of eclecticism and originality. No point is likely to be tried successfully by anybody else without his digesting it and when the time comes turning it to account. At the same time he discovers new points for himself, and uses his whole chest of tools to produce something which has the stamp of his individuality all over it. Just as in *Secret Service* he distanced all of his competitors in the present movement toward American war plays, so in *Sherlock Holmes* he turned toward lurid melodrama because he thought that the public, sated with realism and irrelevant theo-



rizing, was in a mood to take the hottest kind of impossibility; and he accomplished this task so well that even the critic who feels offended if any higher species, like tragedy, comedy, or real romance, descends into melodrama, may feel unchecked admiration for this frankly melodramatic masterpiece.

## CHAPTER IV

### FATAL ENDINGS

AFTER Mr. Herne failed to make *Griffith Davenport* popular, a play on the subject of slavery, and with the additional unfavorable element of a tragic ending, is given yearly by six or eight different companies. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is degenerated, to be sure, and turned frequently into almost a variety show, but the continued popularity of the tale is an interesting exception. *Mercedes*, a tragedy in verse, by Thomas Bailey Aldrich, has thus far been kept more or less on the stage because it was liked and well acted by Julia Arthur, and it is likely to be given occasionally by some actors for a long time. *The Scarlet Letter*, which has much of the proper spiritual elevation of tragedy, has been tried upon the stage without success. In general, it is true that tragedy is not part of the American drama, and therefore any effort to introduce it shows some artistic ambition.

Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote to Mr. Barrie: —

"*The Little Minister* ought to have ended badly; we all know it did; and we are infinitely grateful to you for the grace and good feeling with which you lied about it. If you had told the truth about it, I, for one, could never have forgiven you. As you had conceived and written the earlier parts, the truth about the end, though indisputably true to fact, would have been a lie, or, what is worse, a discord in art. If you are going to make a book end badly, it must end badly from the beginning. Now, your book began to end well. You let yourself fall in love with and fondle and smile at your puppets. Once you had done that, your honor was committed—at the cost of truth to life you were bound to save them."

Of *Richard Feverel* he wrote:—

"The ill-ending does not inherently issue from the plot—the story had, in fact, ended well, and the last great interview between Richard and Lucy, and the blind, illogical bullet which smashes all, has no more to do between the boards than a fly has to do with the room into whose window it comes buzzing. It might have so happened; it needed not; and unless needs must, we have no right to pain our readers.

"I have had a heavy case of conscience of the same kind about my Braxfield story. Braxfield—only his name is Hermiston—has a son who is condemned to death; plainly there is a fine tempting fitness about this; and I meant he was to hang. But now, on considering my minor characters, I saw there were five people who would—in a sense who must—break prison and attempt his rescue. They were capable, hardy folks,

too, who might very well succeed. Why should they not, then? Why should not young Hermiston escape clear out of the country? and be happy if he could, with his — But soft! I will not betray my secret or my heroine. Suffice it to breathe in your ear that she was what Hardy calls (and others, in their plain way, don't) a Pure Woman."

Of the three recent American attempts to make a fatal end acceptable, only one has the consistency from the beginning which Stevenson demands. *Barbara Frietchie* and *Nathan Hale* have first acts of frivolous comedy, and waver between melodrama, tragedy, and comedy throughout; so that they can only be called tragic for want of a better caption. The third and only true tragedy is in one act. It is by a wholly unknown writer, Horace Fry, and its discovery is characteristic of Mrs. Fiske. It is not easy to tell how much of the powerful effect was due to the playwright and how much was due to the superb acting of Frederick De Belleville and Mrs. Fiske, but in any reasonable division there is enough to reflect glory on both, especially since it is so rare for a tragedy to be written in America, and since this little piece, by the simplicity, force, and elevation of the feelings depicted, belongs almost clearly in that domain. If the passions depicted have been high and simple, if the essence of life seems to have been given, so that it is right that life should

end, we are satisfied, even if the tears stand in our eyes; and this is tragedy. If, as in *Tess*, our attention has been taken up with details,—bad luck, misunderstanding, and misfortune,—and the depths of the soul have not been freely sounded when the knell comes, it is not tragedy, but rather what is commonly known as “a disagreeable play.” *Little Italy* was worthy of the brilliant acting it inspired.

In a room in “Little Italy,” the Mulberry Street Italian quarter of New York, a husband, an Italian baker, talks with his wife, who longs for old Napoli and dreams of a singer there whom she loved before her marriage. She hates New York. She would not like it even if her husband could read and write English, and so hope to work up in the world, and to own a bakery on Sixth Avenue. To her Sixth Avenue and Mulberry Street are alike dreary.

A voice is heard singing in the street. The husband is occupied, and the wife, unobserved, shows in her face the surprise, fright, and joy of recognition. She gathers her self-control, tells her husband that this is the song she so much wishes to learn to sing, and induces him to hire the strolling bard to teach her. When she and the singer are alone they go over their old love, she tells of the bitter circumstances that forced her to marry for wealth, and he relates his wander-

ings and his waiting for her. She would be good, but his influence conquers; she packs her bag and leaves on the door a note; in English, so that the husband may take an hour to read it. He is heard approaching and she is compelled to go down through the dumb waiter to the store, while her lover nonchalantly drums his instrument, and, after a little, starts for the rendezvous.

The husband walks innocently about the room, occupied with the concerns of every day. He nods and speaks to his little daughter in the bedroom. Is she asleep? No; she has just awakened. When his eye falls on the paper on the door he smiles. It amuses him. What a fool is his wife, to write in English. He calls the little girl. She sits on his lap and with innocent voice reads off the words which say that her mother never loved her father and has left forever.

The Italian receives each cut with a quick exclamation. At the end he dashes the paper to the ground and presses his daughter to his heart.

Then he springs up. He leaves the home, to do as Italians do in such emergencies. It is too late. The musician staggers in, with the dying body of the wife, followed by an excited Italian mob. In her descent to the store beneath she had been killed. The husband's passionate love breaks over her body in a storm.

Then he turns and creeps silently across the floor for his knife. The musician sees him in time and they struggle. The lover warns the husband of the gallows. His eye falls on the door behind which his little daughter lives, and he drops the weapon, not wishing her to be made fatherless by the hangman. With one more burst of grief the tragedy is done.


Aided by Mr. De Belleville's deep emotion, as the husband, the protagonist (for it is part of the nobility of the play that he and not the escaping lovers are the centre), and by the direct passion of Mrs. Fiske's picture, this little piece had in it such rare worth, that it ought often to be revived.

Two other recent plays ending in death were by Mr. Clyde Fitch, the youngest of our successful playwrights. When he brought out *Nathan Hale* he had already succeeded practically with *Beau Brummel*, *Frédéric Lemaître*, and the more original but weaker comedy, *The Moth and the Flame*, and produced with varying fortunes many other dramas. The historical theme of *Nathan Hale* is one of the most simple and dramatic in our country's story, and if the drama were all raised to the level of its strongest parts, it would be likely to see long life. It is the best plot Mr. Fitch has yet used; and good plots are usually selected, adapted, and not wholly

invented. The dramatist ought to take everything he can from the work the world is doing for him. In *Nathan Hale* Mr. Fitch has fitted a love story to the historical tale, and thus secured in the conventional way, thought necessary even by Goethe, who made a similar change in the history of Count Egmont, some of the conflicts necessary for a drama. Hale is seen first as a young graduate, teaching school in New London, taking existence lightly, making love to his pupil, Alice Adams. The gathering signs of war break up that life, and the second act sees him a captain in the patriot ranks. Alice, who is too weak throughout, extracts a promise, carelessly given, that he will not lead any forlorn hope or needlessly imperil his life. Then a meeting of officers is seen. Washington has asked for a volunteer from among the most trusted officers, to undertake a perilous mission essential to the safety of the army. Nobody volunteers, because a spy's work is despised. The appeal is made more eloquent, and Hale steps forward. The others try to dissuade him. He replies that any work necessary to the cause thereby becomes honorable. Alice Adams, by an awkward theatrical device, overhears the result and pleads with Nathan to remember his promise. He tells her it must be broken.

Within the enemies' lines he learns their plans,





but is suspected by an officer who has seen him in the Connecticut school. As this Tory loves Alice, he plots to accomplish two ends by bringing her to confront the spy, proving Hale's identity by their recognition, and securing her for himself. Hale manages to have her warned, and there is no recognition. As she knows he is a spy, this warning is needless, and the drama would be simpler and stronger without it. His love is too much for him, however, and when he thinks they are alone he embraces her, and his life is lost. The final catastrophe is brought on by a servant, needlessly involving the plot, introducing accident, and taking away the element of Hale's destruction through his own love. In a futile dash for liberty, he drops his papers by the way in the hope that they may reach the American lines in time to warn Washington of a contemplated attack which would probably destroy him.

The last act shows a guard-tent scene, Hale's anxiety to know whether his death at sunrise is to be in vain, his struggle for composure, and his final parting from his love. The next scene is a picture of an orchard at sunrise, the noose hanging from a bough, the soldiers and onlookers gathering, Hale taking his place beneath the rope.

"Nathan Hale, have you anything to say? We are ready to hear your last dying speech and confession."

"I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

That is the final curtain. No more dramatic story could be asked, and in the handling of the crucial situations Mr. Fitch shows a theatrical instinct which makes it worth while to point out the faults, especially where these faults are of the insidious kind that win popular approval. The comedy, instead of running through the play, occupies all of the first act and a half, which might be right enough were it representative in substance and delicate in workmanship, instead of being trivial, although it would be better to devote this act to the development of some larger obstacle to Hale's sacrifice than is offered by a woman's commonplace feebleness. When the serious side of a play is painted in bold colors, big passions ennobled by exalted expression, it can stand the contrast of broad comedy better than when the serious part is in neutral tints, every word and act being subdued and dependent for its effect not on expansion, power, and beauty, but on reserve and mere suggestion. Where there is, as in this play, no high style, no glory of language, and where most of the strongest situations are worked out almost in silence, less contrast is possible. Among the excellences of the drama, however, is one characteristic of Mr. Fitch: it is a good vehicle, and Mr. Nat Goodwin, who

acted admirably in the title rôle, is likely to have successors in the part now and then for many years to come.

This prolific young author has produced other dramas since *Nathan Hale*, showing an ability to seize themes of practical value, wherein he more resembles Mr. Gillette than Mr. Herne. One of them, *Barbara Frietchie*, perhaps belongs to the most popular category in the serious division of the American drama—the social melodrama, but it has an unhappy end. Stage skill is where it mounts highest; cleverness is shown in seizing a popular title unrelated to the play; and it, again, is a tempting vehicle for a star. *Barbara Frietchie* has some strong dramatic passages, some things approaching the higher sentiments, although not really poetic, and all through the first act and in patches elsewhere a kind of kittenish prettiness, which is popular and sufficiently realistic, but hopelessly impossible material out of which to make anything worthy of respect or permanent enjoyment. Mr. Fitch promises to do his best work along the lines of straight dramatic situations. His stagecraft is better than his feeling for life. *Barbara Frietchie* is excellent work of the kind which is learned in the theatre. There are in the second and the third acts places where the dramatic action is straight-

forward and convincing. It may be indeed that Mr. Fitch would have a chance of taking a higher place among American dramatists if he would be content with fewer successes, greater independence, a more severe and self-reliant point of view. This very act of writing about a popular name a play which has nothing whatever to do with the name, shows a dangerous tendency to enter too completely into that world of advertisement and absolute compromise which must be so powerful a temptation in our democracy.

In *Barbara Frietchie*, as in most other American Civil War plays, a Northern man loves a Southern girl. She defies her father and runs away to marry him. By a sudden battle the ceremony is prevented, the minister's house seized by the rebels, and soldiers stationed there. Barbara, who has remained, seeing a Confederate sharpshooter about to fire upon her lover passing with his regiment, drops on her knees, slowly levels a gun she has seized, and shoots the Southerner. Her lover is wounded, and she struggles to protect him from her father, brother, and rebel suitor, and from every little noise which might cost his life. He dies, and she, now wholly wedded to the Northern cause, waves the flag, as does the old woman in Whittier's poem, in defiance of the Southern army, and is shot by her crazy rebel lover.

It is, of course, to the credit of Mr. Fitch's practical ability that a great triumph could be scored and earned in *Barbara Frietchie* by Julia Marlowe. This young actress has had an arduous experience with the world. She has met it with an open-minded courage which is having its reward. I have not seen all of her plays, but in those which I have seen, stretching back to the days in Boston when she burst upon the students of Harvard College like each one's personal dream, down to the present time, she has never shown anything like the authority which she is now exhibiting. In Barbara much maturer work began to show itself. In the more serious scenes in the drama she developed a force and fineness that seemed to lift her material above its natural level. She relies almost wholly on a multitude of clever details, rather than on large, simple, general effects,—her method is one of restlessness,—but within this area her technique has reached a high degree of finish.



## CHAPTER V

### BROAD AMERICAN HUMOR

A CERTAIN form of American humor, not the highest, and yet not unrelated to the larger kind, is found as incessantly in our farces and variety shows as in our presidential campaigns. Fatalism and buoyancy, love of exaggeration, and a taste for slang are some of the components. Any exhaustive description of three years' output from this favorite vein would occupy a volume, but the man who has been our most popular farce-writer, our leading music hall, and the star who best represents this broad humor, taken together, will have enough in common to suggest at least vaguely the nature of this widespread comic brand.

Charles Hoyt, recently dead, the creator of a long line of farces that hold the stage, was witty, good-humored, fatalistic, frank, agile, formless, vulgar — as we are, the great American people; material for profound art if not yet ready for it. In his latest play, *A Day and a Night in New York*, he was less obvious than he sometimes has been. It was conventional, but the conventions were suited to the stage and the United States of

America. The seemingly pious youth, who was really a sport, the father with saffron morals, the deacon, the mother virtuous in church labor, set in a confusion of actresses, managers, and champagne, were stirred about rapidly into various salty pictures and bowed away in a final exit with enjoyment triumphant and Puritanism confounded. Of such is the nature of farce, from Menander to Hoyt, and the question of excellence lies in what is accomplished within these fixed limits. In this play Mr. Hoyt's wit was less horsy and more intellectual than usual, his situations were more neatly elaborated, less hurdled on top of each other, his whole workmanship more refined.

The play was improper, taking that word in the sense in which it is accepted by most of us, seriously or in derision. Superficially it resembled certain French traits, but it was wholly different and wholly American. The French allusions, which Yvette Guilbert sarcastically tells us are so shocking, gain their allurements from the veil which trembles between the thought and the expression; and most of the adaptations from them, with which our stage lately has teemed, lacking that quality, reach the limit of stupidity. Mr. Hoyt has none of that vicious invitation. He tells his jokes as healthy men do in a smoking room, offhand, bringing out

the humor rather than anything behind it. Nobody could be more American. He is often vulgar, but he is often gifted with a large, masculine, easy-going fun. The man with more taste, skill, and depth, but with the same unctious and intellectual resignation, is the American humorist. At the time of his death the following plays by Mr. Hoyt were being played in the United States: *A Brass Monkey*, *A Bunch of Keys*, *A Day and a Night*, *A Hole in the Ground*, *A Milk-white Flag*, *A Texas Steer*, *A Trip to Chinatown*.

That Mr. Hoyt's farces always succeeded where others, that seemed to me fully as good, failed, but marks the truth that this kind of art has laws that are obscure. As an illustration, take one absurdity that bored me less than most farces, because it was so hopelessly idiotic, and made me believe it would run well in New York, instead of which its foolishness fell flat, as it had to be taken out of town almost immediately. It was called *Our Boys*. It opened with an Irish song, marked "comic" on the programme, which said:—

"Say you will be true  
And I will marry you,"

and was encored twice. The plot was then expounded. In many American farces the plot is



confined to the first act and the last ten minutes of the last act. A stock-raiser had four sons secretly married, and their four wives were boarding under maiden names with the stock-raiser, who proposed to most of them. That, in a word, was the plot, but it had embellishments. For instance, the stock-raiser tripped on a step three times in the first act, saying each time, "Darn that step," which was applauded, but evidently not highly valued, as the piece soon stopped. He also carried across the stage a white hen of plebeian aspect, which he called "the prize cochinchina of the barnyard." The principal feature of this act was the shock caused by the unexpected entrance of an idiot just before the curtain fell.

The second act opened in a room ornamented with paintings, which room did not indicate a sympathetic attitude toward art. A donkey was falling on his face at one end. The ghost of something between a white bat and a greyhound was sailing through the air in the adjoining masterpiece. A cat with a red mouth and white eyes filled another canvas, and a cow with the face of a goat reposed between a fox eating the ground and a rooster executing a strut. The stock-raiser said, "I hate to talk about myself, but I bet I know more about art than any man as raises hogs in these United States." He was, however,

dissatisfied with his artist: "You paint me a giraffe with the blind staggers, and try to palm it off on me as a prize cow."

There is in farce a collection of jokes of which it is true, as Shakespeare has it, that age cannot wither them nor custom stale their infinite variety. "You are so lazy. You make me tired looking at you." "I always have my birthday on Monday, because it is wash-day." "I shot four Welsh rabbits." "Do I look as bad as I feel? I would hate to feel as bad as you look." The laws of farce, which are no less powerful than the rules which Aristotle formulated for tragedy, are inexorable, but thus far they have proved wholly indescribable. In this particular drama, four babies in two baby carriages formed the fulcrum of the second part. They were left alone with the stock-raiser, four bottles of milk, and one of paregoric. He yelled at one to keep still lest it awaken the others. The others awakened and yelled, but were quietly stuffed with paregoric. The idiot entered, awakened them again, drank their milk, blew a horn in their faces to drown their voices, and finally placed on the floor a two-gallon jug of milk with siphon tubes, which he inserted in the mouths of the babies. The liquid in the jug was seen to recede at the rate of an inch a second as the curtain fell.



Among stars, the one who most successfully represents American humor in a crude but characteristic form is May Irwin, and the plays in which she appears are vehicles for her personality. In one of them a character makes an escape from handcuffs by sawing a table in two and running away with half of it. In the same play, of the many jokes the one which seemed to hit the centre of the composite heart most fatally told of a couple so poor that they hired a room over a restaurant and inhaled their meals.

In many of the jokes it is the timely, local, or "topical" quality which insures their currency, such as the answer, when a character is asked to subscribe for an asylum for superannuated policemen, "If there is anything I can do to put policemen in an asylum, commend me."

A national criticism is appreciated when an Irishman tells about a countryman of his engaged as a submarine diver, who threw up his job because he could not spit on his hands, and when a Frenchman, who, told that his love-making won't work, replies: "That is why I like it. Anything that won't work I adore." More unusual comment on human nature comes out in a remark in favor of first loves, as preliminary to the serious article, "marriage made from the raw material don't wear," and in the assertion that, though the average girl is a delusion, "for hug-

ging a delusion you cannot beat the average man." How many of our farce jests were known to Joe Miller I never sought to learn.

Fresh and shop-worn jokes and business in such plays hurdle along together in conventional situations, including large doses of such over-worn things as mothers-in-law and man trying to do woman's household work. It was noticeable in one of Miss Irwin's plays that the first song from *The Circus Girl*, which was said to have been successful in England, was a bad failure here, possibly because it deals with subjects not now fitted to our national humor, such as inadequate bathing suits, the good Jumbo, and comparisons of a woman's form to a barrel. Each country apparently has its own favorite objects of humor, even among those which seem to be of much the same nature.

Often our actors of broadly funny personality have technical ability, and Miss Irwin is among them. In response to a popular demand, she naturally relies on her personality; but in one of her plays I saw her do a piece of acting that shows what an actress she is when she cares to be. It is an intoxication scene—one of those things which lend themselves so easily either to flatness or to charm. Nearly every actor tries this metaphysical state one time or another; the great ones do some of their finest work on it, and

the bad ones accomplish some of their most criminal failures. Miss Irwin takes a large glass of whiskey under the impression that it is nerve-tonic. First comes the physical pain, broadly but artistically burlesqued. Then her face expresses a sort of surprise, mixed with stupefaction and vagueness. Gradually this darkens into fixed, earnest contemplation. That look of honest solemnity, which so often colors the face into which alcohol has freely passed, is given on the actress's mobile and radiating countenance. She just sits there and looks, and looks, calmly. Then she pulls herself together and makes a desperate determination to write something. One quill won't work, and goes into her hair. Another follows. The inkwiper gets her face into trouble, and thus the broader and more familiar stage effects follow, well done, but not nearly so difficult and not half so funny as that perfect spiritual absence which rests on Miss Irwin's face in the early stages. Miss Irwin has many elements of the actor's art: the power of proper emphasis, just the right words said casually and low, just the proper pauses, just the needed stress in the places that carry the point. She is natural and at the same time clear and marked. She is a good actress, but she is to a far higher degree a compelling personality. A Falstaff reduced to average Americanism, her vigor, flooding good

nature, fresh humor, without wit or any sharp mental flavor, the impressive quietness of a lull in a gentle and friendly whirlwind, a remarkably rich and flexible voice, these are a few of the elements which have made her so popular. This temperament takes by storm at once the average man, and one who is normally outside of its influence is soon caught in the meshes of the surrounding enjoyment and hypnotized by the crowd. The humor selected by her favorite playwright to exploit this personality, while it is not the best American brand, owes much of its success to its wholly national flavor. No American could fail to understand it, and no foreigner could possibly conceive the elements of it, even since the entente.

In *The Belle of Bridgeport*, which came to New York in the fall of 1900, Miss Irwin bore the singularly fictitious name of Ariel. Although it was unsuccessful, this play seemed to me just like her successful ones. Some of the remarks, mediocre enough in themselves, with which she brought down the house on the opening night, were these:—

“A girl of your age changes her views oftener than a biograph.”

“Many a man who has never proposed suddenly finds himself accepted.”

“Mrs. Lemon of Orange complains of the

salesman in the rug department. After he had unfurled forty-two rugs he fainted."

"Silence is golden. See that yours is eighteen-carat."

"A good bluff is better than a bad fight."

"Your life line shows you are going to die of starvation among strangers."

"Shipwreck?"

"No; boarding house."

In a rehearsal the little daughter admits she has had ten glasses of lemonade, and May Irwin, who plays the mother, asks, —

"And honestly, under the surface, are you happy?"

My final illustration shall be the most popular high-priced playhouse in America, — the music hall conducted by Weber and Fields. When I have been to those much praised comedies of which the best that can be said is that everybody can go without fear of contagion and will catch there neither any moral disease nor any idea, moral or otherwise, I sometimes turn with relief to the hodge-podge of genuine native humor dished up at Weber and Fields'. There seems to be a general idea that such plays as we so often see at the Lyceum, Empire, and Daly's, for instance, appeal to a more refined taste than the music-hall burlesque. This idea must surely be

mistaken, for a refined taste is a real taste; and while the jokes at the little Broadway hall never have any resemblance to a gem, many of them are filled with vitality, and reflect the fundamental nature of the American man. Possibly, also, the plays I refer to at the other theatres reflect something fundamental; but if so, the qualities satisfied are not those which are invigorating to think about. The crude is not necessarily unhealthy, nor is the innocuous always refined. Some of the most salubrious foods are coarse, and the analogy can be pushed some distance in art. If much of our respectable drama, American and English, corresponds to the "pretty-pretty" school in painting, Weber and Fields' is like the rough but sound cartoons and jokes of *Puck* and *Judge*. Of course, their horse play is boresome at times, and one should go there only when he is in a certain temper, wherein a primitive popular expression like this differs from works of art which are at once human and polished, and so can be read in varying moods. Dr. Charles Carroll Everett, recently dead, the subtle and cultivated author of *Poetry, Comedy, and Duty*, related to me that, being convalescent from a long fever, he could read the tragedies of Shakespeare; but the comedies, requiring more agility and being less universal, were beyond him. A comedy *genre* like that fur-



nished by the Weber-and-Fields traditions, partly in German-American dialect, is still further limited, of course, by its very local setting and its unvaried quality. Nevertheless, it is to much of our drama as life is to death.

The piece which opened the season of 1900-1901 will do for an average illustration. It was called *Fiddle-dee-dee*. The nature of this house and its popularity appeared, as usual on opening nights, at the end as clearly as at any time during the performance. Then the members stood around on the stage and made remarks which showed the humor of the place in the process of formation. When De Wolf Hopper first appeared there were loud calls for a speech, and he said to the audience:—

“I hope you will excuse me if I say that I know the programme much better than you do. This is really not the place for a speech. I am afraid Mr. Smith would think I didn't make his jokes go as well as they might. Just let me get his work out of the way, and then will be the time for my own.”

When the piece was over, nevertheless, Hopper seemed a trifle reluctant in responding to the audience. David Warfield encouraged him, “You could do it all right this afternoon.”

(Immense bunches of flowers in every form crowded the stage.)

*Hopper.* Give these property flowers a chance first.

*Warfield.* Don't be so rough with them. They have to go back to-morrow. [To Charles Ross] Here is the same one you had last year, Charley.

When Hopper finally spoke, he said that he was glad to be in the organization, to escape one-night stands. Describing his sleeping-car experiences, he added, "When I finally reached Washington and a stationary bed, I had to hire two men to shake the bed all night and pour cinders down my neck." His conclusion was, "I truly trust that you will call upon Mr. Warfield, because I told him this morning what to say."

*Warfield.* I didn't expect to speak myself, so I wrote a little address and gave it to Mr. Hopper, and so now I am left.

Charles Ross, next called upon, spoke eloquently of his New Jersey farms. Warfield groaned. "And I may add," said Ross, "that Mr. Warfield has two very elegant flats up near Central Park, and they are not all rented yet."

Lillian Russell, more radiant than ready, simply declared she couldn't.

"She says that every time," remarked Warfield sadly.

Fay Templeton, too, humorous, experienced, and welcomed back after a year's absence, illustrated woman's inability to speak extempore and

introduced John T. Kelly, who began, "Elmhurst is situated about seven miles — I can't say nothing."

The author spoke commonplace thanks, and Hopper commented, "Well, at least, say we were better than your lines."

The stage manager was called for, but Warfield discovered that he had his shirt off.

The Writer of the Music: All I have to say is that my farm is at Freeport, Long Island.

This familiar and personal form of dispensing Weber-and-Fieldian jests is among the humor most enjoyed. The most enthusiasm, however, is often raised by beauty; by dances, beautifully set and lighted; by women dressed in the most faultless and inviting fashion of gay caprice; scenes of cheerful brilliancy which are called for again and again.

*Fiddle-dee-dee* was placed in the Paris fair, and began with illustrations of how the natives get especial satisfaction out of the easily bled Americans. Kelly told his troubles, but generously added, "After you get through kicking, you have to bow to it as a great show." Of the tip system in Paris, he said, "Every *garçon* gives up the brass for the privilege of sandbagging you."

Lillian Russell represented a society lady who wished to be reckless: "Nobody knows how much good it would do me to be *outré* for a day." Her singing provoked the comment,

"Your vocal chords may be crossed, but your heart is in the right place."

Hopper was very contemptuous of the Vassar football team, and said that all the best of woman's kicks would be at fishballs. He was a sporty young gentleman, and Miss Russell a swell. "We don't move in exactly the same circles in Paris," said she.

"I don't know about circles," he replied; "I have lately moved in all sorts of curves."

So saying, he beat his chest with a baton, which he handed to the low-necked Miss Russell, with the suggestion, "You do that."

He had quarrelled with a hotel clerk because that functionary would not let him take his horse into the parlor, and had, with all his trouble, grown so thin that his shadow would puncture a bicycle tire.

Rapid sequence, and frequently rapid utterance, give special value to the stream of meaningless humor, which, once you laugh, seizes the nerves of your stomach and makes you the victim of the baldest idiocy.

Weber and Fields have long been a popular team mainly in one make-up and dialect. There always seems to be a lot of mysterious feelings and adventures corked up in these two men, and of their intense joint life we catch only glimpses.

In *Fiddle-dee-dee* Weber complained that the

miles were so short in the small European countries that one began before the other ended.

*Weber.* What did you mean when you said we would get it in the neck?

*Fields.* I don't know, but whatever it was, we got it. . . . If we stay here, we can make a million dollars a day.

*Weber.* We will stay two days anyway. . . . Can't I insure my money, so if I spend it, I will have it, anyway?

*Warfield.* Last week I made 6478 sometimes—that is French money.

*Fields.* How much in English?

*Warfield.* About four dollars.

After the old joke of asking whether a girl at a restaurant ought to be treated to what she likes or what she is used to, Fields said to the waiter, "Bring the lady a plate of canned beef." On one part of the feast his comment was, "This may be a canvasback duck but he has a wooden chest."

"I got nothing," he said to Weber. "You got nothing; he got nothing. Let us form a trust."

*Warfield.* Let us be thieves.

*Fields.* It is the same.

*Warfield.* You are a married man, ain't you?

*Weber.* No. I got those scratches from a cat.

An after-piece to *Fiddle-dee-dee* was *Quo Vass Iss?* which dealt with the literary crimes of Zero

and with the burning of rum by the W.C.T.U. It was, of course, in Latin style.

*Ross.* I have just returned on the limitus vestibulus from Asbury Park.

*Hopper (Petrolius).* You must have a thirstus fit to float a galley. Thou art an easy Markus.

Finishus Ross told about the mystery of Lythia's drawing a lobster on the sand, and Warfield, who was superbly picturesque as Hilo, a hobo philosopher, admitted, "Verily, this stumpeth me."

*Hopper.* Let us to the boozeorium.

*Fields, the boy Smallus, to Fay Templeton, his sister Lythia.* Thou art a punkin ball player. Thou wilt never get to the ninus.

Lythia recounted that Zero had promised to read a poem to the populace. "Didst not see the populace leaving the town as thou camest here?"

*Fields, to Weber, acting the strong man, Fursus.* Tell me your pipe story, and how you twisted that neck off the jackaxe.

*Weber.* It wasn't a jackaxe. It was a wild, untameable borax.

*Hopper.* Thou didst what no other person ever don't before.

In the burlesque of *Catherine* the following appeared:—

*Frank-Worthing-Duke-de Coo-Coo-Charles-J-Ross.* Yes, mother, I love Catherine, but, but, but, but—

*Duchess de Coo-Coo.* My son, you talk like a goat.

She was asked by the boys if she was a real duchess, and soon after addressed by them as Dutchy. It was explained to one of them that the duchess was kicking again because she was waked in the morning by his clothes. "She thinks they're cheap."

"Cheap! They are all covered over with big checks."

Catherine's home was hung with such mottoes as "Love one another" and "Home, sweet home," in pleasing contrast to what went on there. One of the most popular hits at the old father was Miss Templeton's advice to him to take a walk. "You may possibly be run over by a cable car and catch the grip."

Outside of the Catherine burlesque some of the jokes of that evening which, being most American, carried best with the hearers, were: —

*The Mummy.* What a noble-looking being!

*Pete Dailey.* Discovered!

"Your mouth is crowded with talk. Now spill one word at a time and you will be understood."

"My name is Solomon Yankle."

"What is it in English?"

"Reginald."

A burlesque of *Arizona*, the would-be Bret Hartian play of Augustus Thomas, contained a cow confined in such close quarters that she gave only condensed milk. She belonged to the government, and so when she stepped on a letter it had the government stamp and became part of the United States mail. There is nothing male about a cow, however, so Hopper realized that he had made a bull, and both jokes were typewritten, in the trial scene.

Hopper had to look at a map to realize what a state he was in — where even the politicians were too poor to own a ring, and there was no fruit low enough to reach — except that every ranchman had at least one peach, — a joke, of course, which depends entirely on a knowledge of current slang.

One of the women “can give you all the news from Washington.”

“She looks old enough to have known him.”

Political criticism was illustrated by the fact that when one of the officers entered, the cow emitted a loud guffaw. “Ever since the Cuban War any good fresh beef has the laugh on the army.”

When a noise was heard outside, it was announced that a soldier had been shot.

“Where?”

“In the excitement.”



Fay Templeton was Bonita and Charles Ross was Lieutenant Tention, who almost, as in the original, jealously inquired, "Did any other fellow use this comb?"


"I should think," replied Miss Templeton, "that a man who has seen as much as you have has seen enough of life to make his hair curl without combs."

The villain, Warfield, said to the western Bonita, "You are so light and well bred you suggest the (y)east." He urged her to stay in New York, arguing, "If you did, you would regret all the lobsters you miss by living out there." Again, we have in this lobster joke, very funny at the time, an absolute dependence on the double meaning furnished by slang. One of the most successful "gags" of 1900 was this:—

*First Chorus Girl.* I got a pearl out of an oyster at Shanley's.

*Second Chorus Girl.* That's nothing, I got a whole diamond necklace out of a lobster.

Such fun, depending on the complicated and nicely felt meaning of lobster, must be unintelligible in a few years, but it lives to-day, and it is one of the most truly representative features of the American theatre. You will find men of culture quoting from Weber and Fields' burlesques months, and even years, after their performance.



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## CHAPTER VI

### THE DRAMA AND THE NOVEL

THERE was a time when to get intellectual stimulation outside of private discourse it was almost necessary to go to the theatre. The book and the newspaper, by doing cheaply and comfortably some of the things which the stage once did, have undoubtedly injured the drama. The fittest form may have survived, but my sympathies are all with the stage. Charles Lamb, who so loved "some kind-hearted play book," says, "I could never listen even to the better kind of modern novels without extreme irksomeness." The novel is the form for the multitude. Montaigne said, so long ago, "These are my three very true stories which I find as interesting and as tragic as any of those which we make out of our own heads wherewith to amuse the common people."

One man's food is another man's poison, but on the whole it is the superior fragment intellectually that is poisoned by the novel. If the remarks of Lamb and Montaigne should be met by any assertions about the state of fiction

in their day, the horizon might, in answer, be widened.

LORD CHESTERFIELD : —

“A romance generally consists of twelve volumes, all filled with insipid love romance and most incredible adventures.”

THOMAS CARLYLE : —

“Were it not reasonable to prophesy that this exceeding great multitude of novel writers, and such must, in a new generation, gradually do one of two things : either retire into the nurseries, and work for children, minors, and semi-fatuous persons of both sexes, or else, what were far better, sweep their novel-fabric into the dust-cart, and betake themselves with such faculty as they have to understand and record what is true.”

SYDNEY SMITH : —

“Now, though it were denied that the acquisition of serious knowledge is of itself important to a woman, still it prevents a taste for silly and pernicious works of imagination ; it keeps away the horrid trash of novels ; and, in lieu of that eagerness for emotion and adventure which books of that sort inspire, promotes a calm and steady temperament of mind.”

JULES LEMAITRE : —

“Yes, pictures of the soul's movements and of ‘the passions of love’ are interesting ; but it is very long, George Sand. Yes, the various types of the human animal living in society, and its hidden or visible rela-

tions to the environment in which it develops, are a curious thing to study; but it is very long, Balzac. Yes, 'the physical world exists,' and there are arrangements of words which are able to revive in our imaginations objects which are absent; but it is very long, Gautier."

NOAH WEBSTER:—

"With respect to novels, so much admired by the young, and so generally condemned by the old, what shall I say? Perhaps it may be said with truth, that some of them are useful, many of them pernicious, and most of them trifling. A hundred volumes of modern novels may be read, without acquiring a new idea. . . . At best novels may be considered as the toys of youth; the rattle boxes of fifteen."

Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote to William Archer:—

"Nay, the object of a story is to be long, to fill up hours; the story-teller's art of writing is to water out by continual invention, historical and technical, and yet not seem to water; seem, on the other hand, to practise that same art of conspicuous and declamatory condensation which is the proper art of writers."

That is the essence of the matter, put by a man who was defending and not condemning the art. Yet what a condemnation! Darwin is said to have read poor stories to rest his leisure hours,

when his brain had hardened against the higher poetry. Did any one ever read plays for that purpose? No, the drama can be used as an anodyne only when it is on the stage, and as it must then be paid for, and is to be had only at fixed hours, it can never be used so much for mere distraction as the novel is. In Darwin the indulgence would be questioned by no one, but harm certainly comes to thousands of men, and especially women, who use romance to kill thought; a consolation, as has been said, which is like reading a cook-book to cure hunger. A friend was praising novels, in contrast to plays and essays, because they give the thousand slight touches which produce intimacy with the characters. "Then why not read biography and memoirs?" said I. "Because," she replied, "the story leaves them young and happy, and history ends in old age and death."

Any form of art is liable to abuse, but there are forms in which abuse predominates. Almost the whole effect of poetry in verse is good, because those who are reached by it at all are attracted by the best it offers. An essay will be thrown away or used for sustenance. In the drama the spectator's mind and feelings are lifted, or else he has merely wasted an occasional evening. The empty novel, on the other hand, with thousands of people, seizes a large part of their lives, claiming

hours of every day. It is long, accessible, exciting, and in those three qualities, which contain slight advantages, lie its peculiar dangers.

→ [Whatever good may come from the reading of novels, the length alone, to which their loose form is a temptation, is a heavy price. Calculate the plays by Shakespeare, Marlowe, Schiller, Molière, which might be read in less time than is demanded by *Middlemarch* or *Anna Karénina*; the essays by Bacon, Montaigne, or Seneca, which would equal *David Copperfield*; the poetry by Milton, Keats, Heine, Musset, which occupies less space than *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. The novel might be called a play, plus the author's talk about it—a drama with stage directions infinitely elaborated. There is no plain “dies,” no “enter Iago,” no “cuts Cassio in the leg and exit,” but pages instead. (“Why,” said Bentley to the son whom he found with a novel, “read a book which you cannot quote?” Its lack of quotability is a result of its prolixity. “What,” asked Seneca, “is the body the better for meat that will not stay with it?” And again, “There are many things worth knowing, perhaps, that are not worth learning.” Bentley's test will bear pondering.) “Reading maketh a full man,” says Bacon, but he did not mean the reading of novels. Interesting nearly everybody, the novel is nourishing literature for almost nobody. “Read

anything five hours a day, and you will soon be learned," said Dr. Johnson. Read novels five hours a day, and you will soon be weakened. There have been and will be great novels, but it is an inferior form, and genius will tend toward simplification and elision. I think the world is beginning to feel this. (Many of our leading novelists have recently attempted or contemplated the drama. If, like Hauptmann and Sudermann, Meredith, Hardy, and Kipling could turn successfully to the drama, I believe that most of them would not return.) Of course the novel must remain, not only because it is the general literature of democracy, the cheapest in price and the easiest for the untrained imagination to grasp, but also because for certain aspects of life it is ideally the right form; but, just as in the past the greatest literature of nearly all countries has been preponderatingly dramatic, so may it be in the future. Any great artistic form needs restrictions, and the conditions that surround the play have been found in many centuries and many lands to be favorable to large, permanently human art, while the novel is "a bastard epic in low prose," freed from even the laws put upon its parent, the epic in verse. There will be great artists, like Cervantes, Fielding, and George Sand, who will work successfully in the novel and less successfully in the drama, but the gen-


eral relative standing of the two forms cannot be permanently reversed.

The Elizabethans took good plots wherever they could find them, many of them from novels. The dramatist of to-day is addicted to the same source, but with this difference, that where, at various former periods, novels have been used by playwrights for their dramatic possibilities, they are now chosen for their large circulation, and the result must be many a bad play for which the mere advertisement of the novel secures a long run. Recent seasons have seen almost innumerable attempts in this direction, but only two in which high artistic and business success were joined, *Vanity Fair* and *The Little Minister*, the latter of which I have already frequently referred to.

#### ROMANCE. DUMAS AND STEVENSON

Romantic novels of action also are almost inevitably shorn of their literary value and rendered more melodramatic on the stage. Of the many which had no value in the original, many of them pseudo-historical and American, I shall not stop to speak. Dumas and Stevenson are the two romantic novelists of permanent fame who have recently appeared upon our stage. Dumas is usually in favor on the boards; *Monte Cristo*





runs perennially, with James O'Neill starring in the version used by Fechter, a poor melodrama of no literary value; and in the season of 1898-99 there was an epidemic of *The Three Musketeers*, three versions running at once. The most successful, called *The King's Musketeer*, was no drama, but a series of exciting scenes in which various dramatic motives kept up a generous go-as-you-please. Anybody afflicted with intellectualitis would undoubtedly have spent a troublous evening in the whirl of irrelevance; but the unsophisticated human being for whom the world and most of art's treasures are especially created was sorry when the story was over at midnight.

It was a brave spectacle, fit, with all its unevenness and frequent crudity, to warm the blood. There was no thought, no taste, no common sense, nothing boresome or difficult, just a fine procession of pictures and adventures. The literary charms of Dumas were gone, but part of his framework was left, and even that was more bracing than the ordinary drama. The adapter could not disguise the greatness of the author whose every scene is ably stagey.

With Stevenson, also, some of his literary genius remains when the literary charm is gone. Richard Mansfield usually draws crowds to see his grewsome version of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. *Prince Otto*, less a story of action than most of

Stevenson's, was put on in New York in the fall of 1900. Otis Skinner, the star, was his own dramatist, and his well-meaning attempt was a reminder of the proverbial error of being one's own lawyer. His efforts, which may hereafter furnish admirable paving-stones, had for their immediate result a play of slight value and no offence — unless one be offended by the lack of all Stevensonian quality in a play founded on his novel. Mr. Skinner, on the opening night in New York, made a warm and modest little speech, in which he astutely put Mr. Stevenson to the front as the author to whom the possible merit of the play was due. This was in a sense true, for although Mr. Skinner with unerring accuracy eliminated style, structure, and character from the story, the breeziness, originality, and sporadic dramatic quality which distinguished it from other romantic comedies represented Stevenson shining through the fog furnished by his adapter. As the play made a cheerful evening, the novel was butchered not without compensation, since it made a good New York holiday, and the novel remains to delight coming generations. Stevenson, in a letter, called Otto "my poor, clever, feather-headed prince." Did Mr. Skinner put no meaning into that word "poor"? He did not show his amiable impotence, his gentle vanity, his practical inferiority to his wife and the prime minister. "Why,

think what Musset would have made of Otto!" exclaims Stevenson. Mr. Skinner made him a stage hero, defying mobs, rescuing women, getting the best of every one. He didn't weakly read Sir John's private papers, not he! Sir John (become Lord Philip, of course) requested him to peruse the document. He was not out-argued by the nobles and peasants his share of the time, but always was the top of admiration, and this is what the eternal actor mind dearly loves to be. Of course it helped take away the soul from a novel in which Stevenson aimed higher than was his wont — aimed higher than in any completed story I happen to know of his. The melodramatic, to which he tended, is here subdued. Let him speak for himself: —

"I am morally sure there is a play in Otto. . . .

"The echoes are very good, all the sentiments change round, and the points of view are continually, and, I think (if you please), happily contrasted. None of it is exactly funny, but some of it is smiling. . . .

"There is a good deal of stuff in it, both dramatic and, I think, poetic; and the story is not like the purposeless fables of to-day, but is, at least, intended to stand firm upon a basis of philosophy — or morals — as you please. . . .

"Why, think what Musset would have made of Otto! Think how gallantly Dumas would have carried his crowd through! . . . Otto is no 'fool'; the reader is left in doubt as to whether or not Seraphina was a Mes-

salina (though much it would matter, if you came to that); . . . the romance lies precisely in the freeing of two spirits from these court intrigues. . . .

" . . . it is a strange example of the difficulty of being ideal in an age of realism."

The ending, so touching in the original and so truly happy, was given in the play the lowest form — the retention of a kingdom, freedom from which is, according to the story, the escape to genuine life. I do not see why the end of the novel is not just right for the conclusion of the play. Stevenson thought differently, but Mr. Skinner's solution would have given him the heartache. To the man who was to collaborate in the play Stevenson wrote:—

"The kind, happy dénouement is unfortunately absolutely undramatic, which will be our only trouble in quarrying out the play. I mean we shall quarry from it. . . . A brave story, I swear; and a brave play, too, if we can but find the trick to make the end. The play, I fear, will have to end darkly, and that spoils the quality as I now see it of a kind of crockery, eighteenth-century, high-life below-stairs life, breaking up like ice in spring before nature and the certain modicum of manhood in my poor, clever, feather-headed prince, whom I love already." The scenes "at the end, Von Rosen and the Princess, the Prince and Princess, and the Princess and Gondremark, as I now see them from here, are nuts, Henley — nuts."

Yes, it is nuts still for somebody. There will some day be a better play made from this story, which is, as it stands, so near to greatness.

#### DICKENS AND THACKERAY ON THE STAGE

Thackeray being delicate and undramatic, his novels might expect on the stage a cruel fate. Mr. Sothorn tried a version of *Henry Esmond*, which ran one night. *Vanity Fair* had a different history. That, and a dramatization from Dickens, appearing in New York about the same time, illustrated striking points of difference. To see one of the subtlest and most original creations of English fiction put upon the stage, and then to admit that there was hardly a side of that character which was not adequately and vividly brought out by the actor, amounts to saying that Minnie Maddern Fiske's representation of Miss Sharp takes its place among the memorable triumphs of the actor's art. Had the play been as powerful as the acting and the stage management, the effect would have been tremendous. As it was, the drama, while strong and fine in the last half, was scattered and undramatic, and consequently rather slow, in the first act and a half. There is not among the great novelists of England one, unless it be Jane Austen, whose method is more essentially opposed to the method of the theatre than Thackeray's, and therefore Langdon Mitch-

ell, in attempting to make a play out of *Vanity Fair*, chose about as hard a task as could be wished. Dickens throws his characters on to the page almost as he would have done had he been a playwright. Reading one of his novels, *A Tale of Two Cities*, for instance, which is the foundation for *The Only Way*, given in New York simultaneously with *Becky Sharp*, or *Little Nell and the Marchioness*, played soon after, one sees the characters stand forth in broad, simple outlines, easily seen, as it were, from the back of the theatre, and having no complexities that would require more than the two hours' traffic of the stage for their presentation. They also walk in bold, dramatic, even melodramatic strides. They talk in that tone—and feel and act in that tone. But to make a play of Thackeray you must find some device to give, by an entirely different method, what he gives by one of the supplest of literary styles, and one of the most confidential, by a thousand intimate and minor revelations, by insistence, by repetition, by half-humorous sermons, by a whole network of fine-spun, sophisticated, intellectual distinctions, that could not possibly be shown behind the footlights or understood before them. Thackeray is a magician, and his magic is inseparable from his style. Through his power of forging immediately any kind of literary weapon he needs, he can bully the reader

through hundreds of pages, laughing at him one moment, throwing cold water on him, explaining to him the methods of literary trickery, and in the next paragraph, by a mere change of tone, forcing him to tears. Added to this is an immense variety of characters and of their mutual relations, but there is no skeleton; and a drama, without a skeleton, is impossible.

*The Only Way* was well made and well acted, and succeeded. *Little Nell and the Marchioness* was not a public success, but it showed how easy it is to make Dickens into a play. As the name combines two characters which have nothing to do with each other, so the whole play was loosely constructed, or barely constructed at all. It was made up of scenes taken anywhere in the novel, and put together any way, with certain minor changes, which were often forgotten by the playwright after he had made them, so that he allowed dependent later remarks to go unchanged. Nevertheless, the play was extremely interesting, which only proved again that you can put Dickens on the stage almost as you please, and he will do the rest. The relation between the novel and the drama is a subject of such constant application to-day that it will doubtless be described successfully some day by some critic; but thus far nothing luminous, so far as I know, has been said about it. One thing that we can start with is

that the novels of Dickens contain the elements of theatrical effectiveness in a much larger degree than those of most writers of fiction. The fact that all of his novels and most of his stories have been dramatized is in itself pregnant, and many famous actors have made much of their reputation in interpreting his characters. Opinions about the value of his creations may legitimately differ, but that many of them are creations, and not fragments, there can be no reasonable doubt. There is an age at which most of us, full of interest in the minute elements of expression, in cleverness, in Henry James, in the descendants of Jane Austen and Thackeray, lose our sense for the importance of structure, of the skeletons both in the story and in the characters, and the realization of the superiority of things to say over slight modifications in the way of saying them. We are interested in verbal niceties, in elegance, in the virtues for which the French are eminent. After we come out of this Henry James age we may very well agree with the gross public and put Dickens even above Thackeray, to say nothing of lesser men of the same school, both as thinker and as artist. Of course, there was a good deal of Dick Swiveller in his creator, and it would not be surprising if Dickens knew it. The author's mixture of sympathy with Swiveller and clear observation of his absurdities is one of



the greatest charms of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. It is also true that Little Nell is not in the same class as a successful creation with Swiveller and Quilp, and that the author's elongated pathos is frequently fully illustrative of Swiveller's own weaker side. When the orchestra played music in the pathetic parts of *Little Nell and the Marchioness*, *The Only Way*, or *The Cricket on the Hearth*, it seemed no insult, because it had just that obvious sentimentality that the corresponding part of the novel has. After all these admissions, however, are freely made; after it is admitted even that Dickens's pathos never approaches tragedy, and usually verges on shallowness of expression, there certainly remains enough to make it a steadying experience to read one of his novels, after long neglect of them, and after indulgence either in the clever style or in the run of contemporary romantic and historic fiction. The crowd is not always right, but it is right a good deal oftener than anybody else. It was interesting, by the way, to notice that the audience laughed at Quilp's cruelty, because of its grotesque form, and that they were particularly pleased with the broader side of Dickens's humor. Swiveller, much the most interesting character in the book, was made more sympathetic in the play—again showing the actor's nature. *The Cricket on the Hearth*, as Mr. Jefferson gives it, is better

than the book, because the softest side of Dickens is less in evidence.

The most recent Dickens adaptation seen in the United States is *Tom Pinch*, played by E. S. Willard, which consists of a number of pages taken without dramatic instinct from *Martin Chuzzlewit*. It lacks every element of a play. Not only a plot and structure, but dramatic scenes, and even dramatic dialogue, are wanting. The anonymous adapter has selected from the abundant material of *Martin Chuzzlewit* the least dramatic parts, and handled them feebly. All the exciting threads of the novel, all the adventures, are avoided. Jonas and his fellow-villains do not appear. Cherry is there, but without her discomfiture or her scenes with her sister. Merry appears, but of course without the regeneration that grew out of her suffering with Jonas. Young Martin's transformation is mentioned, not shown. And so on. There is no change, no development. It is merely a selected reading of those passages relating to Tom Pinch, and they are not what makes the novel great. Dickens the humorist and Dickens the story-teller seldom nod; but the Dickens who sits down to tell us explicitly about goodness, and to talk *ad lib.* about Little Nell, for instance, or Tom Pinch, is a much smaller artist. Mr. Willard shows Tom's outside and inside with his usual certainty and delicacy,

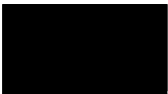
but after all there is not a great deal to show in that virtuous individual.

In Thackeray what a contrast! In the first two acts of *Becky Sharp* the author has made the mistake of giving a number of broad, charming, picturesque scenes, which call up all our devotion to the novelist, but which weaken the actual effect in the theatre by a lack of dramatic construction, which means a construction in which one effect is so closely connected with the preceding one that there is a constant accumulation of attention and no dissipation of interest. From the time that the sound of the call to arms begins to be heard among the revellers at Brussels, *Becky Sharp* is a play; before that it consists of fragments from a novel. Much credit falls to Mr. Mitchell from the fact that he has used Thackeray's language rather sparingly, and yet, even with that comparison before us, we are seldom conscious of any flagging in the dialogue.

In portraying the character of Becky, Mrs. Fiske used to the full almost every one of her powers, and very few of her mannerisms. There was little repeating of words, hesitation, extremely slow talk, and attitudes that have at times been too individual and insistent to be effective. Becky is a tremendous subject. She is so big, so many-sided, so thoroughly created by Thackeray, so typical of large things, that, like all the

highest imaginary creations of character, she can have many faces for many readers, just as in real life she had many faces for many men. Mrs. Fiske's Becky was not my Becky. There were places in which she did the direct opposite of the things which I had seen Becky doing in the book; but after three hours in the theatre Mrs. Fiske's Becky was mine. I do not mean that I believed that my old friend was not a real Becky, but that this new one, coinciding in so many aspects, was, when it diverged from what the book had given me, so consistent, deep, and able, that it would have been mere fatuity not to accept it as an equally just and impregnable presentation of the same character.

Mrs. Fiske seems to act with unlimited brains, and no commodity on earth is better suited to the comprehension of Mrs. Rawdon Crawley than brains. Not only was each attribute given with the clearness of understanding and with the effectiveness of powerful art, but the impression left at the end was unified, solid, and lasting. In the first act we see her gayly tampering with life. She lies, and when she is caught she has the amused unconcern that grows out of her constant ability to turn the truth, however condemning, off into some harmless channel. Her wit, her matter-of-fact tolerance toward stupidity, her contempt for it, her understanding of every motive, her never sleep-



ing, practical instincts, stand fully before us before it is time for the first curtain. In the second act her ability to fascinate men is shown, well in each individual case, but there are too many cases. Such scenes are nearly always displeasing. Immediately after this, however, comes a most remarkable triumph of stage management. The ball at Brussels is being brilliantly presented on the stage; various groups are amusing themselves in varying ways, and there is a constant easy going and coming. Then we suddenly notice a man standing at the head of the first flight of stairs, with one or two other men standing near him. A soldier enters on the ground floor, walks up the steps, speaks to the man at the head of the stairs, and departs. Another comes in the same way, and in the same way goes. Then our friend, George Osborne, who has been playing picquet with Becky in a crowd at one of the tables, is quietly tapped on the shoulder. He, too, approaches the man at the head of the stairs, and suddenly departs. Another officer is detached from the gambling throng, then another, and then another, and no word is said by them, and no jot of gayety leaves the players. The next soldier who enters is spattered with dirt, and he ascends the stairs with a quicker stride. Suddenly a young man at one end of the stage starts and listens. He has heard something. His com-

rades laugh him down. The fun rolls on. Then another player starts from his group and listens, and cries out, and he, too, is drowned in laughter. But soon the sounds grow louder. We can hear them in the distance. The merry patches of guests begin to move nervously. More and more have heard something, and are wondering whether it could be what they were all beginning to dread. Finally the call to arms comes clear and strong, and the boom of cannon. The dispersing of the crowd is now rapid, and after a little only Becky is left, ready for her scene with Jos. So vivid and so extremely natural was this slow creeping in of fear, with its early vague suggestions, rising and rising to certainty, that after I had recovered from the intense excitement with which it held me I sought to know the identity of the stage manager, and learned that the stage manager and the leading actress were one.

The play was, taking critical and popular success together, the event of a season, and ran well the next. The third act was the most liked, but to the critical sense the fourth was its equal. When the story of *Carmen* is finished, the reader turns the page and suddenly comes upon one of Mérimée's dryly sarcastic essays on words. If he is a literal and simple-souled person, he may be either puzzled or contemptuous. If he has an eye for the finest ironies, he will be Mérimée's slave

from that day. The last act of *Becky Sharp*, which was made up of the garret scenes, and ended with Mrs. Crawley's marching off to church with Sir Pitt and his wife, had precisely this kind of intellectual felicity.

## CHAPTER VII

### OUR ONLY HIGH CLASS THEATRE

It was three centuries ago, to be sure, that Ben Jonson said, in reference to the theatre, "This is the money-got, mechanic age"; yet possibly the love of wealth pervades all classes in America to-day more than it has done in any other country at any time.

Again, the most influential living critic of the drama known to our day told us that even in the foremost theatre the modern world has seen the comedies of Molière are now played badly, but in spite of this we know that acting at the Français is better than it is anywhere among us.

Felix Schweighofer, visiting New York, told my brother that even in Germany the taste for farce was increasing, and that Shakespeare and Schiller drew small houses. This seems to be in conflict with the best evidence; but whether or not it is true that the tendency of the world at present toward purely vacuous entertainment is increasing, our gratitude need not be less for what of the higher drama is left upon the stage.

The best average acting in any American play-




house is seen at the one which gives, in German, more classics than any of our English-speaking companies. These two facts are inseparable. Whatever may be true for the actor dominated by income, and caring as much for one audience as another, for the player who measures his progress by the perfection of his talent, the play is the thing. An actor may be cast almost anywhere in *Twelfth Night*, and know that if he cannot do great work, the fault is not in the rôle. Not Viola, the Duke, and Malvolio alone, but Andrew Aguecheek, Maria, the clown, even Sebastian and Antonio, are so profoundly conceived that they will hold the genius of a great actor; and in this regard *Twelfth Night* is but an example of the truth, that in a great play, which is composed of deeply created characters, however few their lines, lies the artistic salvation of actors, great and small. What should be sought by our player of ideals is an entrance to some company where there are frequent changes of bill, made necessary by a regular clientele, and a line of plays in which he will be sure of finding in his part not a wooden image accompanied by minute stage directions about his clothes, but the outlines of a solid and typical human being, whom it is his privilege, by the power of instinctive sympathy, to re-create. Where can the English-speaking player find that opportunity? Nowhere, except in cheap stock

companies, without repertoires, but with weekly changes of bill, resulting in overwork and lack of finish.

"Unless," said George Henry Lewes, in 1867, writing of the drift of our plays toward cheap diversion, "unless a frank recognition of this inevitable tendency cause a decided separation of the drama which aims at art, from those theatrical performances which only aim at amusement of a lower kind (just as classic music keeps aloof from all contact and all rivalry with comic songs and sentimental ballads), and unless this separation takes place in a decisive restriction of one or more theatres to the special performance of comedy and the poetic drama, the final disappearance of the art is near at hand." Aid to dramatic art would not benefit exclusively the scholarly few, for the people would receive not only the indirect advantage which they have in any advance in education, but also a direct influence. In Europe the poor flock to the best plays, especially on Sundays and holidays, and the effect of the theatre is often strong. One of the most enjoyable performances I have seen was at popular prices on Sunday night, when Sudermann's *Sodom's Ende* was given at the Irving Place theatre without dropping the curtain, to evade a silly law. Recent experiments on cheap theatres of very high standards have succeeded in Germany. An elevated

drama makes people talk and think. The older Germans in New York go home to discuss the play. Their children, already Americanized, seem more likely to demand farce. To stir up thought is the essence of education. Nothing moves vicious spectators to keener emotion than stage morality, but the melodramatic virtue is a debauch without lasting traces on character, wherein it differs from sound art, the results of which are as substantial as any branch of education.

Why does the stage of to-day give so much of its time to show and frivolity? Causes have been suggested, from farcical to philosophic. One scientific mind finds the germ in the tendency of people to dine too late, another in the influence of the music halls, a third in the price of seats, and a Frenchman in the excitement on the stage of the world. When streets and newspapers are crowded with gigantic farces and melodramas, why pay to see puny plays by make-believe actors in tiny theatres? Why waste substance on a poor imitation? asks the Gaul. "Shakespeare and Balzac are no longer with us; but reality, as it is to-day, made more clear and more dramatic, tortured and illuminated as it is, would discourage even them, and what they saw would force them to renounce what they were able to imagine." A merchant of Paris explains the loosening grasp of the theatre by the reflective pessimism of



all disinterested persons capable of observation and judgment. In many of our accomplished dramatists there is a tone of sadness and disquiet. "The expression of this pessimism differs with the temperaments of men, but under the hard logic of one, under the melancholy of another, under the subtle and bitter philosophy of a third, there is always the same disapprobation, either expressed or suggested, of all that they observe. At the theatre, whether the piece be of M. Hervieu, of M. Henri Lavedan, of M. Maurice Donnay, of M. Brieux, it leaves the heart pinched and dry, after having laughed or cried. The droller the piece, the more bitter it is." It is not merely satire, but "ensemble condemnation, ironical or terrible, of the whole social system. To find a parallel we must revert to the time of Voltaire and of Beaumarchais. But then they demolished with joy, with a wonderful plan for ideal reconstruction before their eyes. Now we swing the destructive axe with a tired hand, with a resigned nihilism, which says, all is bad, and all will be worse." The *Figaro* tried to console this discouraged frequenter of the theatre by telling him not to think so much, to dine oftener, and to be happy, adding that everybody has not the privilege of dining.

Really he is worthy of notice, because he represents, in one form, the dislike of the middle class,

more in this country than in his, to any reflection not obviously cheerful or sentimental — a taste which guides comedy toward farce, and tragedy into the path of melodrama. The more ignorant spectators, who formerly followed the lead of the educated, now read, have opinions and enforce them. Caliban is in power and sits in judgment at the theatre.

When the desire to make money, and a lot of money, is the principal aim, long runs are a necessity, and it seems to be the experience of managers that a large sum of money spent in scenery and dresses usually pays in the increased length of the run. The tragic quality of *Macbeth* was smothered in Sir Henry's magnificent adornments. Tawdry concoctions like *A Lady of Quality* ride to glory on the richness of their trappings. The worship of stage moonlight, glass dewdrops, revolving forests of Arden, and mahogany doors deepens every year, so that there is now a hope that the evil may die of its own excess. Perhaps the invention of the great American biograph will relieve the pressure, diverting the spectacle-loving audiences to separate houses, limiting the others to mere drama and acting.

The stage depends upon the eye as well as the ear, else it would add nothing to the reading drama, and all great playwrights have written

much of which the value is appreciated only in representation. The expression of the actor likewise should be as much in outward motion as in delivery. One famous critic, carrying the words in his memory, used to stop his ears, to judge the pantomime—the acting, in the strictest sense. A play is something more than dramatic literature, but it is something more than spectacle. *Twelfth Night* at Daly's was reconstructed to enable Miss Rehan to wear good clothes, and I was puzzled for some time by the phrase "costume plays" among stage people, until I discovered that it included all historical drama. The Greeks paid little attention to costume. The acting and the play were the centres of their attention. "Scenery, indeed," says Aristotle, briefly, "has an emotional attraction of its own, but of all the parts (of a play) it is the least artistic and connected least with the art of poetry." "Some have insinuated," records Colley Cibber, two centuries ago, "that fine scenes proved the ruin of acting." Even Lessing, strict as he was from the intellectual point of view, favored, in his experiment with the Hamburg Theatre, the retention of some plays merely because of the opportunities they gave certain actors. On the other hand, no attempt to maintain a theatre for intelligent people is likely to succeed without a sharp rejection of the whole tendency away from simplicity in

production. Scenery should be a background, hardly noticed, to take the place of stage directions and explanatory dialogue, not an independent attraction. A fair amount of money is spent on scenery at some of the best theatres in Europe, but it is kept in its place.

Dramatists write with an eye to this drift toward undramatic elements, and study real gondolas and boot-trees, giving pages of directions about the flowers and candelabra in a room or the dresses on a woman. Modjeska speaks of "these times of encroaching realism, when modern imagination needs material help to transport itself into another sphere."

"This showing of everything," says Lamb, "levels all things; it makes bows and courtesies of importance. . . . By actors and judges of acting all these non-essentials are raised into an importance injurious to the play." Where the interest is not in the irrelevant skill of the actor, which Lamb objected to, but in his shoes and the curtains in his room, the harm is greater. In this respect our metropolitan theatres are the worst. An audience in New York goes to the theatre and talks, not about the essential elements of Pinero and his art, but about the appearance of a local favorite in his new rôle. It applauds, not when the pauses in the dramatic story invite a relaxation of attention, but when a popular actor ✕

makes his entrance or a stage waterfall is revealed. Perhaps no Anglo-Saxon public will ever enter into the drama with such whole-souled reality as the French and Italians do, but in smaller cities in the United States there is much more ingenuousness and direct feeling than in the large centres. A play, therefore, often has on the road a fairer test of its merits. In New York it is personal flavor, the something that lends a kind of piquancy to the idea of the player, which makes a favorite; and, curious as it may seem, art has a better chance, in comparison with personal idiosyncrasy, in Cincinnati or in Cleveland. The overemphasis of scenery, costumes, and properties is made in New York for the same reasons. If you are self-conscious at the theatre, if you go there neither to lose yourself in the play nor to get the idea of it, but to gossip about persons on the stage, you will desire a setting which is not barely what is needed for background and suggestion, but which gives you a lot of little points to notice and chat about. You like to see a pretty lake in the middle distance or a "taking" gown on Miss So-and-So. I believe Goethe called such art pathological reality. At any rate, he reminded us of the ape, at large in a library, who made his dinner from a bound volume of beetles, and of the sparrows who pecked at the cherries of a great master.



"Does not that show that the cherries were admirably painted?"

"By no means. It convinces me that some of our connoisseurs are true sparrows. Does not the uncultivated amateur, like the ape, desire work to be natural, that he may enjoy it in a natural, which is often a vulgar way?"

Now the theatre in America in which these conditions hold least is in New York, and it is the home of a German company, under a German manager; yet what makes the little house on Irving Place so notable is something thoroughly familiar and intimate to the minds of cultivated Americans. It is that the drama, as we know it, is on a higher plane than it is in any other theatre in this city }—on a very much higher plane than it was at Daly's during the lifetime of Mr. Daly. There is always more or less talk about the possibility of making the stage in England and the United States more satisfactory to educated people, but seldom has there been such a crop of articles on this subject as there have been lately. Many of them were started by the unexpected success of Mr. Benson and his experiment of giving a number of Shakespeare's plays in the course of a season. [The leading dramatic critic in England told me at a rehearsal at the Irving Place Theatre that if there were one man like Mr.

Conried in England, the task of making a change for the better would be infinitely more hopeful. It was his opinion that our German theatre stood above everything in London as distinctly as it does above everything else in New York. ]

For this superiority several causes are discoverable. Not only is the German taste more serious, but as there is no large floating population, which is an important element in the support of the Broadway theatres, changes of bill are more compulsory. As there is only one notable German theatre in the city, and as the director of it is compelled to do what in Germany is divided among several houses, he gives up a good many weeks to farces of a kind which run a year even in Germany. He manages, however, even during the weeks when these runs are on, and his treasury is being filled, to set aside almost every week one evening or more for some valuable play; and before the farce season begins, and after it ends, he puts on the best to be found either on the library shelves or in the serious productions of the day. When the theatre was begun it needed some help, but I believe it now supports itself. Of course it does not make as much money as a good many houses on Broadway. Mr. Conried remarked a while ago in conversation that if he were simply looking for a business, he could find a better busi-

ness than running a theatre. He thinks (and it is what distinguishes him from his American contemporaries) that running a theatre ought to be taken more as an art than as a trade. Of course, he wishes to make money, as all of us do, but there is every difference in the world in the degree to which that one object is allowed to control all the other aims of a rational man's existence. The director of a theatre is a most important element for various reasons, one being that he can make his audience. Mr. Conried is now busy in various ways endeavoring to extend his influence among the kind of people who will wish the best that can be put upon the stage. From the colleges especially he hopes much. He gives lectures at some of the leading universities, and sometimes he gives performances at colleges at his own expense. It is certainly probable that young men who learn German at college, and have their attention thus early called to this opportunity of adding year by year essentially to their knowledge of dramatic literature, will be guided by it in their own habits and those of their children. The increase cannot be fast. Such solidly founded things seldom hurry. It takes some experience for an ordinary American, even with a good education and a knowledge of German, to feel the full superiority of the Irving Place Theatre over its American contemporaries. The more thoroughly one has risen to the

best uses of the dramatic art, the more he learns to prefer correct intention to any special excellence or charm. Such a person will often prefer a performance by the Murray Hill Stock Company to anything then going on Broadway; whereas the first visit to that theatre is likely to prove tiresome, because there is no very marked ability in any one of the actors. If, however, real feeling for the acted drama and intimacy with it can lead one to prefer, on the whole, the Murray Hill to the Empire, how much more will one prefer a theatre which has not only the correct point of view, but superior talent also, more enlightenment and executive ability in the management, and more training and histrionic ability in the actors, than are to be found at the English theatres? A short time ago I was watching Max Halbe's famous play *Jugend* at the Irving Place, enjoying it thoroughly, and thinking over questions which some American actors had asked about the possibility of putting on an English translation. It seemed to me likely to fail, whoever might attempt it; yet it ran so well in Germany that it at once made for the author a reputation. Only part of the difference is in the audience. Another point is that it is almost impossible to think of a cast that would play it as well as did the members of Mr. Conried's company. The only weak point was a visiting star. The idiot was played by

Julius Strobl, a man who in his years here appeared often as the leading young gentleman in farces, or a young swell in society plays; who was Dr. Rank in *A Doll's House*, some nameless soldier in *Wilhelm Tell*, De Guiche in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and so on through a long list, and his performance in *Jugend* was simply perfect. The girl was played by Emmy Schroth, whose versatile talent ranged from Rautendelein in *Die Versunkene Glocke* to ordinary soubrette rôles and the pathos of *Jugend*. This is one of the important conditions of the Irving Place Theatre. When an actor is engaged there, he shows his repertoire, which sometimes includes several hundred parts. Starting with such an equipment, it is comparatively certain that he will put more or less intelligence into his view of a new character even before rehearsal, and these parts have been played in a land where he cannot walk around on his personality, but must interpret the character which he is representing.

One or two details in which the methods of the Irving Place differ from those on Broadway may be worth mentioning. Nowadays a play is seldom read aloud in an English company. The actors simply have their parts assigned them, and they frequently never see or read the whole play. Some of them defend this practice on the ground that when you meet other people in real life, you

do not know what they have been saying or doing, or may say or do hereafter—an absurd argument, of course, as art cannot be accidental. At the Irving Place Mr. Conried always reads the plays to the company before assigning the parts. When rehearsals begin, there is another difference between his method and that of the English companies. He rehearses one act at a time, not taking the second up until the first is perfect.

In trying to tell how the actors at this theatre are superior to our American players, one is met with the difficulties which always exist in describing solid, mature excellence. Let one quality stick out, and it is rather easy to give an eloquent picture of it; but the superiority of Mr. Conried's company consists in objectivity, in harmonious work together, and in versatility. The actors play farce, on the whole, perhaps, neither better nor worse than our own superior farce companies; but these same actors can play the highest poetic dramas; they know how to recite verse, and they know the meaning of poetry. This is a prime requisite, if we are ever to have in English anything corresponding in quality to what we have in German. It is even more necessary, because almost the whole of the English drama which holds any place in the general literary heritage of our race is in verse. One of the most encouraging things about Mr. Conried's

theatre is that it shows beyond a doubt that an equally competent man who should, with moderate backing, establish a theatre in the American district, and run it on the lines followed at the Irving Place, would succeed, if by success he meant something besides wealth. For the public this would mean that we might see in our own language every year not only all the plays of the great national dramatist, but selections from the other Elizabethans, and from Dryden, Sheridan, Goldsmith, from the best dramas of our contemporaries, which might not be fit for long runs or performances by ill-balanced companies, and translations from foreign dramatic literature; and that we should see these plays acted as well as classic and modern plays are acted at the Irving Place. The average number of plays given in a season at this theatre is considerably over sixty. Many of us would give much for one such theatre in English. I once suggested to Mr. Conried that all good American actors expected higher salaries than could be paid in such a company, which must be so large that many members are idle on any given night. "Nonsense," said he. "We do not need reputation. I could pick up the actors I needed in Terre Haute."

## CHAPTER VIII

### RECENT SHAKESPEARE: COMEDY

ALL Anglo-Saxon players wish to appear in Shakespeare. Ask an actor what parts he hopes to do when he is free to choose: Hamlet, Shylock, Macbeth, Benedick, Romeo, Iago. Ask an actress: Juliet, Beatrice, Lady Macbeth, Rosalind, Viola, Portia. It seldom fails. It is not some other dramatist. It is Shakespeare.

Various attempts have recently been made, many of which it is as well to pass by, but all help to show that actors have good reason for wishing to keep the works of the bard upon the stage. "If you can play Shakespeare," said a prominent actress, "you are all right. All kinds of characters are made to your hand. But if you cannot, the problem is not an easy one." Even a vaudeville actor wrote: "I would attempt Shakespeare to-morrow, only I'm afraid that the newspapers would 'roast' me. They seem to be prejudiced against a vaudeville actor essaying tragic rôles; but time may overcome that, as I think the day is not far distant when it will be a common occurrence to see *Julius*



*Cæsar* or *Hamlet* played by variety actors at continuous performances. I am busily engaged at present reconstructing Shakespeare's plays, as there are lots of lines in them that I do not like, and I think by careful pruning and rewriting I can improve on them so as to make them acceptable to a vaudeville audience. Don't misconstrue me when I say that I will improve Shakespeare. I do not mean in its entirety, as I believe there are lots of lines in Shakespeare's plays that should not be touched; but if they don't suit me, I will be forced to change them."

Of course objections are made. John Chamberlain wrote to Sir Dudley Carlton, in 1614:—

"Indeed our poets' brains and inventions are grown very dry, in so much that of five new plays there is not one that pleases, and, therefore, they are driven to furbish up their old, which stand them in best stead, and bring them most money."

Dramatists naturally are foremost to object to any plea for repertoires made up largely from the classics, because, when we keep the best plays of other days, we are in a position to demand good work of our contemporaries, whereas, if there are no old dramas to rely on, we must take the latest thing, whatever it may be.

Daniel Frohman, in a magazine article, once

said that our audiences want not literature but relaxation, and explained the change partly by the cheap books and magazines. Of course good literature is relaxation for those who like it. Art has always, as an ideal, pleasure. It is in the dignity and depth of the happiness they give that the difference lies between *Lear* and *A Trip to Chinatown*. Mr. Frohman also said: "A second and still more urgent reason why managers pause before setting out on the production of a play by the great dramatist, lies in the fact that the artistic standards of the stage have so greatly advanced within the last few years. Our audiences demand better acting, more realistic accessories, more expensive stage setting, than ever before. A really great actor is always certain of success. Now an actor may have a sufficient degree of skill to succeed in a modern society drama, or in plays of the 'romantic' school, but it is Shakespeare who finds him out! And modern audiences are not satisfied with one good actor in a leading rôle. A Shakespeare presentation requires a company, each one of which shall be an artist. It requires the same attention to realism in stage furnishings, the same elegance of appointment, as in a modern play, and these are more difficult and more expensive in a Shakespearian production."

Large casts, it may be added, are required also.

Mr. Frohman's point that it takes an actor to play Shakespeare, is especially interesting. It does not take a great actor, but it takes a real actor. It takes a man who can be at least impersonal enough to let a part shine through him. A man who can play himself and wear fashionable clothes and fashionable manners can do much in a modern society play. Our plays are largely spoiling our actors by making no big demands upon them.

*The Merchant of Venice*, like most Shakespearian productions at Daly's Theatre, was conscientiously brought up to date. Miss Rehan had not in some years created a part in which she had shown her talents to such advantage, but she was set in a dilapidated play. The production had a name borrowed from Shakespeare, but elaborate pains were taken to keep it from being too stupid for this age.

There was the Daly method, and I must wander from Shakespeare for a moment to illustrate it by the Daly performance of *The School for Scandal*. Sheridan wrote his comedy for a company of players, and Lady Teazle is a part no more "fat" than others in the play, since Sheridan, in giving an admirably balanced dramatic action, entirely overlooked the necessity of glorifying one actor. There was, therefore, nothing open

to Mr. Daly but to supply Sheridan's oversight, which he did with astounding frankness. The orchestra played when Miss Rehan went off the stage; she took away a speech belonging to Charles Surface, in order to have the last chance at the audience. In dialogues where six or eight persons are of equal importance, she sat at the side while the others talked, and when it was her turn for a word she walked out into the centre, all the others faded off, and the word was spoken. Again and again in several scenes was every bit of art sacrificed to the desire to force this actress into the middle of the stage. It followed, of course, that her delivery must match this factitious eminence, and she said a simple line with an air which would have made Hamlet dizzy: "Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus." Miss Rehan has unusual gifts, but it is worse than futile to force a whole play to be nothing but background. Some of the grossest instances were in the scenes between Sir Peter and Lady Teazle. When Miss Rehan spoke, Sir Peter obediently pretended he was dead. When he spoke, Miss Rehan went over to an interpolated musical instrument and pounded for the attention of the

audience. She gave an imitation of a trotting horse in one place, and went through another variety turn in imitation of a peculiar mode of speech.

"Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature; for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was, and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now, this overdone, or come tardy off, though it make the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve." The action at Daly's had nothing whatever to do with the words or with the modesty of nature. The actors simply walked up and down the stage, sawed the air with their hands, shrugged their shoulders, and snickered, to supply the place of acting their parts. Everything they did stuck out. They could not seem to hold any effect by legitimate means. Every player seemed to be trying to kill every effect except his own and Miss Rehan's.

"And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them; for there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh, too; though in the meantime some necessary question of the

play be then to be considered; that's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it." Hamlet's opinion, as applied to this playhouse, would have been that the hundreds of interpolated exclamations and laughs, repetitions by the whole assemblage of what one actor said, whether it is "never!" shouted fifty times, or "you! you!" forty times, or "did" and "didn't" one hundred times, and all the silly skipping about and laughing that accompanied them, added nothing to the value of the play.

On the other hand, not to be unfair to this histrionic playhouse, the few things which chanced to be given with an approach to comprehension at that theatre stood beautifully above the rubbish of the day. In *Twelfth Night*, for instance, the company was charming in spite of silly alterations in the text, because each actor happened to fall into a rôle where his faults were checked and his merits accentuated, and there were other great plays well given there. *The Merchant of Venice*, however, the last Shakespearian attempt of Mr. Daly, was not one of them. When Colley Cibber was maltreating Richard III and King John, no less a man than Henry Fielding led the attack on him, and Alexander Pope embalmed him in satire. "As Shakespeare is already good enough for People of Taste," said Fielding to Cibber, "he must be altered to the palates of those who have none;

and if you will grant that, who can be properer to alter him for the worse?"

In the first place, *The Merchant of Venice* was arranged to fit the scenery and Miss Rehan. Shakespeare could stick out his board whenever he wanted a new scene, but now that we have glorious and expensive "sets," we much live up to them; and as it is impossible to have an unlimited number, Mr. Daly's method was to choose the sets and then arrange the play to fit. His version opened with a pantomime street scene, various people silently "guying" each other. Then entered Antonio, and for a time the Shakespearian order was followed. To keep the speeches from boring the audience, however, property Venetians passed to and fro, and particularly efficient work was done by a troupe of small children, who chased one another about the street, running and laughing. Then came scene two of act two, given in the usual manner, except that the troupe of children got in especially vigorous work, and there was a slight improvement in Launcelot's business. He stroked his hair and smiled, in apparent anticipation of the jest he was to spring on his father, and then forgot his intention and had the old man take his hair for a beard by pure accident. Then we were turned back to act one, scene three, and had the borrowing of Shylock's money. The improvements here in the



words were slight. The general drift of them will be indicated by "I had forgotten — three months; you told me so, eh?"

This scene ended act one of the new version, and the scenes composing it were reduced to one. So far was this bold principle of having everybody come to the spot carried that I wondered why Mr. Daly didn't give us *Antony and Cleopatra* and preserve the unity of place. A subtle accompaniment of the same principle was the scenery itself. As scenes which take place in various parts of Venice were brought into one, so were widely separated localities in that old town made more neighborly. A place apparently near the Rialto bridge contained the St. Mark's lion, with his head turned, and what looked like a segment of the ducal palace. Elsewhere in the play a tapestry showed St. Mark's place with the Campanile, the lion, a piece of the palace, and no St. Mark's.

Miss Rehan's entrance was saved for the second act. The curtain rose. Actors call this having the entrance, and they like it. This was scene two of act one. Miss Rehan did the humor part of it at least fully enough. Those who think of Portia as dignified and serene, half melancholy with all her intellectual humor, quiet, poised, affectionate, needed to take a new view of her, but Miss Rehan brought out the fun with





all her unction. Nerissa was driven to the wall, and it was not a conversation between the two so much as an exhibition of the abilities of the star.

The second scene in this act gave a square in front of the Jew's house. At the Third Avenue Theatre, when the stock company was competing with Mr. Daly in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, there was vaudeville between the acts. Mr. Daly's taste was much finer. All the scenes from acts two and three that could be made to fit the set were run in here, and the best of the specialties were introduced. The revellers came out and gave an exhibition, with a sort of couchee-couchee dance as the main feature; Jessica was serenaded by a crowd with "My Lady Sweet, Arise," from the second act of *Cymbeline*; the limelights shone brilliantly on Jessica's face as she exclaimed, "I am glad 'tis night," and, finest and most masterly touch of all, when the lonely Jew came homeward across the deserted bridge (an effective and already tested interpolation) he stood and listened to the singing down the lagoon, and the curtain fell. Instead of majesty and sorrow, there was a pretty tune.

The third act gave the first two casket scenes, well set, judiciously staged, and well acted by Miss Rehan, though without the touch of seriousness that the danger might suggest. In the ducats and daughter scene Shylock came running

on the stage, chased by a mob of children, on whom he fiercely turned, putting them to flight. Mr. Sidney Herbert put ginger into this scene by passionate delivery, wild gestures, and such embellishments as "at our synagogue, Tubal," five times instead of two. Thus little things and big went hand in hand in building up the old comedy to reach our standard. No "My God, take my life, but spare my child" scene of the day could be more unmistakably intense than Mr. Herbert made this.


The trial act was in some respects high art. Miss Rehan's conception was original, dignified, strong, and it was carried out with a master hand. Even with Miss Terry's beautiful simplicity, matchless elocution, and quiet, melting poetry fixed forever in the memory, it was no less possible to admire Miss Rehan highly. Her reading was more modern, less exquisitely adapted to the spirit of the play, but still noble and powerful. There was more that was threatening, less that was pleading. The "quality of mercy" speech was in her handling an indignant protest and a warning, not a plea to melt a stone, but it was given with the authority of a noble art. If Miss Rehan had been a shade less kittenish in the early scenes, and a little less the star, it might have been one of the rôles to go down in glory to posterity.

Sidney Herbert, the Shylock, acted best when



he was most reminiscent of other Shylocks, in the early parts, and he soon grew melodramatic, and was never poetical or sympathetic.

Mr. Daly, who was a strange superstition with many people, clung to a rigid and wholly meaningless system, no more like Shakespeare in spirit than it was like Christian, pagan, or man. He allowed no liberty of conception to his players, asked no help or advice from any one, but forced every actor to play his mechanical game in delivery, gesture, and conception. He had no more reverence for a great poet than a pork-packer. He distorted Shakespeare's language, paid no attention to the order of his scenes, but borrowed a kind of distinction from his name, while he brought him down to the level of the Philistine, sacrificing the whole power of his order and harmony, to get in a pretty stage moon, give Miss Rehan an entrance, or introduce a ballet. He was fond of the pretty-pretty, and cared nothing for majesty, simplicity, ingenuousness, and grandeur. As, in construction and language, he knew no law but a tasteless love of cheap prettiness, so in acting he forced his servants to walk to and fro like machines, lift their hands and bob their heads in gestures which interpreted nothing, but served only to keep up a restless motion, and to talk correspondingly. From the pitiful corpse which resulted, in this produc-




tion of *The Merchant of Venice*, the genius of Miss Ada Rehan emerged triumphant. I have named certain faults, all to be summed up in an over-emphasis of her natural gifts of facial expression and voice, and a constant unfairness to her fellow-actors; but through all these errors of vanity and ignorance her talent shone forth and gave us a Portia that was all her own, full of original conception, force, and beauty. If by any miracle this actress could have been surrounded by a good company, and taught to act for the whole play, her Portia would have left a fairer memory. The spirit of the whole, however, was infinitely less praiseworthy than the accomplishments of Mr. Mansfield and Mr. Sothorn, or even Miss Adams.

When Ellen Terry was last in America in the season of 1899-1900, which was the season following the Daly production, she wrote to a friend from Boston: "I believe there was more money in the house one night than there ever had been before. And do you know what the play was? It was the dear old *Merchant of Venice*."

Now I do not object indiscriminately to business and scenery in Shakespeare, and am not ignorant of the report that in Elizabethan times a fox was chased across the stage by real dogs. Nevertheless Sir Henry Irving, to a degree a

thousand times less than Mr. Daly, seems to me to make similar errors. There were times when, both in the production and in the acting, the Avon poet seemed leagues away. The small crowd of people who were put in to give liveliness to the opening picture, before the entrance of Antonio; the variety show revel of masques after Jessica's elopement; the gondola; the contrast of the festive music with old Shylock's interpolated walk across the lonely bridge: such things as these are picturesque, no doubt, and no manager can surpass Sir Henry in the execution of them; but they are not right, they are fundamentally corrupt and away from the spirit which brings out the best in Shakespeare. Of course it must be remembered that this leaning toward inappropriate decoration is slight, but yet it is necessary to speak distinctly of it, if one believes that the austere and simple has still a place in the intellectual life. How can any person sensitive to poetry, to the higher drama, fail to feel that Antonio's opening speech strikes a sad, noble note; throws open the play in a large, free, dignified tone of grandeur; and that to precede it with a picture of a few vivacious and motiveless supernumeraries is to clip the wings of imagination, lower taste, and please only the unwary? There were but four or five such places, but they were too many.



In the acting a related fault threaded along with the excellences. Too many of the players treated Shakespeare as if they were ashamed of him. They tried to bring him down to a modern tone of drawing-room conversation. The actor who would really allow Shakespeare to live must not fear rhetoric. It would be wiser for him to fear Shakespeare and pin his faith to Ibsen. Let him rather rant than chat, take too swollen rather than too thin a manner. Miss Terry, a radiant proof of the beauty that shines out when Shakespeare is taken as Shakespeare, might be a lesson to some of her companions. Ardor, ardor, always ardor; speed, buoyancy, life; the spirit of a new birth in thought and feeling—that is what we want for Shakespeare. That vigor, fulness of life, naïve joy and impulse, an early spontaneity and freshness of response, is largely what has put Ellen Terry on her lovely pedestal. Her gait, her voice, her face, the wave of her hand, the toss of her head, all glow with the quick, warm, throbbing life of spring, of buds and inspiring air—which is Portia. No depth of thought will suffice when it comes to living the creations of an exuberant and beautiful fancy. You may be as clear as Euclid, as wise as Nestor, as deep as Kant, and you will not come within fifty miles of intimately expressing the poet. Only the skipping spirit, the joy in living, the truth that is only beauty, can

fathom the mystery. Why did Portia's nature in the last two acts stand out like a beacon, showing the rest of the play where it should go? Surely not because Miss Terry consciously held views different from the other players, but because her blood is different, her nature abundant, full of light, as sensitive to the chords of sound and fancy as to those of fact. She gave to the early scenes more of fatigue or rest than they should have had, but that is merely the penalty of being mortal; and she still sketched out their humor, grace, kindness, happiness; and when she conducted the trial, she swept away every criticism and flooded the stage with beauty. To tell why all we feel for Shakespeare lived in her, and in her alone, would be too hard. It is not a merely formal correctness, for there are little technical faults in placing the *cæsura* every line or two. But they counted for so little. They were as nothing, because the resplendent music of the lines was being rendered on an organ worthy of its harmony. Hearing the same speeches for year after year, we might reflect, when the other actors were talking, that even great art may be too familiar; but before the uplifted, vital delivery of Portia's lines in this great scene doubts all vanished. I got for a moment the sense that there was Shakespeare, in full inspiration, fully shown; it is one of those moments that count in



life — that count as stretches of ordinary justness never can. It makes the art of the actor seem one of the rich and worthy arts.

From the poetry and multiform grace of Miss Terry during her most alert moments to the other merits of the performance, the step must have something like the chill of a downward plunge, "the bitter lapse into everyday life." Sir Henry Irving is a great actor, — one of few, — high, austere, strong, original, and even beautiful. He showed greatness, too, in Shylock, but only in flashes, and loaded with a conception that was intelligent rather than poetic. Perhaps Shakespeare saw this Jew upon the stage as a comic person. If he did, when he poured into his words in majestic sounds the wrongs of all his race, when he gave justice to his cause and grandeur to his revenge, he saw into the hearts of the fleeting audience of his time, smiled at them, and stood apart, just as genius must always merely rest in the common mind to reach in every direction above, beyond, and below it. We have a perfect right to see, if we can, not only what Elizabethan audiences saw in Shylock, but all Shakespeare put there. When Edwin Booth played the part as high tragedy, he was firmly right. Sir Henry Irving, in drawing it with justness only, with psychology, without hostility and without love, drew with the hand of a master, but left out of the picture much of the



poignant sympathy that it might fairly hold. His Shylock, unlike many of his parts, seemed rather keenly thought out than felt and fused by feeling. He seemed like a powerful artist working on material which he deemed archaic. Still, his power counted, and the many other touches throughout, combined with the elevation of the last scene, in which for the first time all the details seemed perfectly fused, and the result full of stark, convincing distinctness, left an impression that must remain. To the eye and the imagination he gave the despair at the end, — the simplicity, the free, unincumbered essence of cruelty and failure, the Hebrew nobility and sufferance, — so that for this last picture no more deep, just, or unified impression could be asked.

Since Miss Rehan and Miss Marlowe have abandoned the rôle, no prominently successful Rosalind has appeared. *As You Like It* was the first Shakespearian production at the Murray Hill, and it lacked both correctness and vitality. Nevertheless it was interesting to see what idea of the play would be received by the series of sincere and natural audiences that go to this theatre. To many of the spectators every line seemed new, and they laughed heartily at the real wit and entirely ignored the strained conceits, such as Rosalind's pun on "hem." The audience was


not blasé, and it was intelligent. It represented the "middle class," and represented it favorably. Of course it liked a "stunt," like the seven ages speech, or rather applauded it; but in that it resembled all audiences. It knew enough to ridicule singing-bird whistles in Arden. The company did not play fast enough for Shakespeare (few companies ever do), but it played faster than most companies. There was no infinite stretching out of Celia's weariness, Rosalind's coquetry, the clown's wit, the shepherd's simplicity, etc. A "property actor" is often better in Shakespeare than an expert in attenuated stage "business." A somewhat similar result was seen in a hasty stock-company production in Washington, in which Blanche Bates was an exuberant and compelling, if somewhat rough Rosalind.

*As You Like It* was also put on earlier, by Julia Arthur, with actors wholly unused to Shakespeare, with so little preparation that they struggled to remember their lines and were constantly prompted, and naturally had none of that free play, vivacity, and enjoyment which constitute artistic sincerity.

In delivery, an extreme naturalness was taken as the key to everything. This avoided some errors and begot others. There were no shocks, but more than half of the beauty of language was simply buried. The verse — beautiful, elas-

tic, sparkling poetry — was treated as if it were a realistic talk, thus losing much of what makes it not only immortal in itself, but the cause of immortality in many a capable actress. The actors must know their parts until they love them, live in them, and *hear them sing*. The theory of suppression in Shakespeare must be thrown overboard, and in this play replaced with the idea of a gay, poetic lark in a forest quite unrelated to the world we sweat in. Miss Arthur, good in spots, most of the time let the humor and vivacity go by default, and spoke and acted as if it were mere matter of fact. She said she was in a holiday humor, but she did not seem to be. She improved as time went on, but the part is too light for her.

One interesting dispute arose over this performance. The play was not tampered with. It is seldom, indeed, that the order of scenes has been followed so faithfully, most managers supposing that the scenes can be stuck in anywhere to fit the scenery. In this performance the story was complete and orderly, and the language was equally respected, being changed only from failure of memory, never from the desire to improve Shakespeare, which makes many productions of him worse than useless. The only impertinence was the introduction of a lot of monks in an attempt to make the all-round marriage at the end realistic and spectacular.



Now this loyalty to the text aroused a fiercer attack than any of the artistic errors. Mr. William Winter, who used to emasculate Shakespeare for Mr. Daly, attacked Miss Arthur rudely for saying "child's father" instead of "father's child." Nothing could better show the Daly point of view. I commented on Mr. Winter's unfairness (or ignorance, which it apparently was in his first criticism), cited the authorities, and printed this letter to me from the foremost authority in the United States: —

"DEAR MR. HAPGOOD: It is somewhat surprising to hear an actor blamed for *restoring* the text of Shakespeare. Yet this appears to be what has happened in the case of Miss Arthur and her rendering of *As You Like It*, Act. I, Scene III, line 12. Here the Folio of 1623, our sole authority for the text of this play, has a natural, logical, and forcible reading: 'No, some of it is for my *child's father*.' Rowe, in his second edition, changed this — against every sound principle of textual criticism — to 'No, some of it is for my *father's child*' (*i.e.* for *myself*), and this lawless bit of 'emendation' became fixed in the *textus receptus* of the last century, and has, either from squeamishness or from inertia, been retained by several modern editions. Dr. Aldis Wright, however, whose Cambridge edition is universally recognized as affording the best results of Shakespearian textual criticism, has not hesitated for a moment to follow Theobald and return to the reading of the Folio. Miss Arthur, in all justice, deserves credit for doing likewise.

"The burden of proof, let us not forget, is always on the 'emendator.' In this instance, it is a burden too great for any scholar's shoulders to sustain. There is no ground whatever for suspecting that 'child's father' is not what Shakespeare wrote. On the contrary, the context is altogether in favor of its correctness. 'Is all this sorrow,' says Celia, in substance, 'for your absent father?' 'No,' Rosalind replies, 'some of it is for my absent lover.' The whole turn of the sentence calls for a designation of Orlando, and the Folio reading gives us such a designation. Rowe's substitute takes the point out of the passage. 'Is this sorrow all for your father?' 'No, some of it is for *myself*.' A sufficiently weak and impotent conclusion — by no means the reply which Celia's roguish query calls for! Again, the reading of the Folio supplies the proper introduction to 'cry him and have him,' a few lines below. 'Him? Whom?' 'Why, the person just mentioned, my lover, my future husband, Orlando.'

"But, some one says, 'child's father' is indelicate. I think not. At all events, the most fastidious of Elizabethan ladies would not have objected to it. It means no more than 'the man I hope to marry.' Celia and Rosalind are alone, and they are bosom friends. Have we got so far from honest plain-speaking nowadays that a heroine may not tell her adopted sister that she hopes to marry and have children? But grant a slight indelicacy (which I do not, in fact, grant for a moment), what then? Elsewhere Rosalind does not shrink from such things. The speaker of v, 2, 12-15, was not likely to hesitate at 'child's father.'

"Let us not confuse two distinct questions. Indelicacy is one thing, textual criticism is another. If 'child's

father' is so offensive that modern ears cannot bear it, an actress may cut it out altogether. If it is to be kept, it should be kept in Shakespeare's form and not in Rowe's. But, to an Elizabethan neither the phraseology nor the idea was indelicate, nor, properly taken, should they seem so to a nineteenth-century American.

"Sincerely yours,

"G. L. KITTREDGE."

Nothing daunted, and far from admitting a slip, Mr. Winter replied as follows:—

"The line in question is spoken by the Princess Rosalind, and is addressed to the Princess Celia—the latter having asked the former, in a spirit of kindly banter, whether her silent sadness, or troubled preoccupation, is for her banished father. To this inquiry Rosalind answers according to the first Shakespeare Folio, 'No, some of it is for my childes father.' The rank impropriety of this speech is obvious, and not only its impropriety, but its vacuous silliness. Rosalind, it should be remembered, is a young, unsophisticated girl, and now for the first time her maiden fancy has been touched; she is smitten by the beauty and the victorious strength of Orlando, whom she has seen but once, but with whom she has fallen in love at first sight; and this emotion, strange and new, has had its customary effect of confusion and perplexity. Nothing could be more completely inharmonious with the feelings and the character of such a girl than a speech that is vulgar and flippant, almost to ribaldry. Even if you think it right to make Rosalind talk like a prurient wanton, you have no warrant to make her talk like a fool."

I put this little tiff on record merely because Dalyism has played a large rôle in American stage history. It was the *Ladies' Home Journal* standards in regard to Shakespeare. It is a tiresome task to prepare Shakespeare for drawing-room tables. This needs less a scholar than a prude. Respect for facts and scholarship cannot be forced on a man. If Mr. Winter differs from a most imposing list of authorities, the explanation is simple. You cannot prove that Velasquez paints better than Bouguereau, or that the great Elizabethan's taste was deeper than Mr. Daly's. You can prefer a pink and blue tea room to a cathedral if you choose. No law will ever make Dalyism over again. Its adherents will rewrite Shakespeare to suit their own tastes to the end of time, while certain coarse men persist in relishing the Elizabethan genius. "Sup" was substituted for "lie," and similar words throughout, when the *Taming of the Shrew* was given at Daly's.



## CHAPTER IX

### RECENT SHAKESPEARE: TRAGEDY

Two productions have done more than any other recent events to encourage in me the belief that living American actors are likely to combine popular with artistic success in Shakespeare. Certainly the two American Shakespearian creations of the last few years which stand conspicuously first in excellence and fidelity are Richard Mansfield's *Henry V* and Edward Sotherton's *Hamlet*.

*Henry V* was so magnificently produced by Richard Mansfield at the Garden Theatre in the fall of 1900 that an immediate popular success was scored by this, one of the least dramatic of Shakespeare's plays. Magnificence, however, while it was what carried the audience to storms of approval after the most spectacular scene, was by no means the only quality. Mr. Mansfield decorated the play with such skill that the sweetness and majesty of it, the poetry which is its whole nature, instead of being crowded aside, seemed to be only appropriately clothed. It was made as far as possible a war play; but it is also



a poem and character portrait, and in this production, as in the drama itself, all three were blended.

The act which proved the most popular was not written by Shakespeare. It was not written by anybody, for it contained no words. The chorus, strongly, intelligently, and poetically rendered by Florence Kahn, was made by the poet to say this:—

“ But now behold,  
In the quick forge and working-house of thought,  
How London doth pour out her citizens !  
The mayor and all his brethren, in best sort, —  
Like to the senators of th’ antique Rome,  
With the plebeians swarming at their heels, —  
Go forth, and fetch their conquering Cæsar in.’

Upon that hint Mr. Mansfield, following Kean’s example, trusted, not to the quick forge and working-house of thought, but to the improvement in stage machinery and the love of visible motion which dwells within the human breast. The whole fourth act, in this arrangement, was a scene in a London street, where the populace hailed the arriving troops, marching in battalions, with cross-bows, pikes, and lances, passing rapidly forward through an arch in the rear and off through the crowd to the side. Now and again a soldier was joined by his wife or by a waiting maiden, and amidst the excitement of it all the harder side of



war was suggested by one woman's fate; she rushed among the soldiers to ask one question, and then was carried senseless from the ranks. A dance of girls with flowers was one feature of the pageant, which ended with the entrance on the stage of King Henry on his battle horse.

Next to this in spectacular triumph was a picture of Henry's wedding to Katherine, which closed the evening. I did not grudge the success gained by these features, since they were well executed in themselves, not inharmonious with the drama, and the means whereby thousands were led to spend an evening in the company of gorgeous language and noble sentiments.

The cutting of the text and rearrangement of the scenes was almost constantly felicitous. Passages of great length, except Henry's speeches, were omitted, as were those lines in which the meaning would not be immediately clear to a modern audience, and a few words which show a cruelty in King Henry incompatible, to our minds, with the kindlier movements of his heart. A mistake was surely made in not dropping the first scene between Katherine and Alice, for by making it part of the scene where the princess meets the king, the absurdity was introduced of having Katherine learn her first few nouns in English a few seconds before she addresses Henry in his own language. The ingenuousness was taken out

of the chorus, and possibly that was prudent, in view of the nature of audiences; but the cutting took away some of the most charming and familiar bits. Occasional words were changed in deference to religious sensibilities without injury to the play.

Mr. Mansfield's performance of Henry showed his skill as an actor to a high degree. Many players carefully choose rôles that fit their personalities. Not so Mr. Mansfield. Famous for satire and character parts, he now stood forth as a king who was half warrior and half saint, so that every stroke the player made had to be with his talent against his natural physical characteristics. None the less he gave a performance of the extremely difficult rôle which was worthy to stand among this able and varied actor's proud achievements. More poetry, more sweetness, and more power might be put into Henry, but Mr. Mansfield had something of each of these qualities, and he had so much spirit, dignity, and humor that no fair person who had built a somewhat different Henry out of Shakespeare could refuse to accept Mr. Mansfield's as fine and just. He was too quiet at times, but in the famous speech, "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more," in which, standing before his bending army, which did "stand like greyhounds in the slips, straining upon the start," he gave many

of the resounding words with heroic fervor and memorable aspect, although he necessarily lacked volume. Small of stature, and mental rather than passionate in temper, he lacked every natural advantage, yet the actor subdued himself to his work, and his art made him adequate. An equally able actor of another school would more completely fill the rôle, but equally able actors are rare, and so are equally venturesome and ambitious ones.

The account of the horrors of war, delivered before the gates of Harfleur, was given with truthful and determined calm, and the sudden charge to "open your gates," in the voice of easy and prompt command, was admirably just. In his second tired and friendly defiance to the herald, and in the delivery of such sharp reflective lines as "God Almighty! There is some soul of goodness in things evil," he was in his element, and his speech on ceremony, which lacked poignancy, was full of a soldier's direct and honest meaning, and Henry was in Mr. Mansfield's acting, what he was in his own eyes, first of all a warrior. When he cheered his followers in the English camp with visions of the future glory of St. Crispin's day, the specially intelligent first night audience responded with applause which showed that they felt in the actor a contagious gallantry. In his wooing and his marriage he was still the soldier, and the Saxon soldier, downright and com-

manding, but with greater play of gayety and wit — a buoyant airiness that came with double force after the words and scenes of war. Mr. Mansfield here and there through the play sacrificed metre to modernity, as in the accent of "aspect" and the length of "ocean" in the "once more unto the breach" speech, to avoid the unfamiliar. After the opening night he grew steadily better. The last time I saw him he played from start to finish at the top of his bent, with full, effective delivery and high spirit, with his *panache* always in evidence, so that the lines of his part never seemed more beautiful, even in reading. It was certainly a much more remarkable achievement in every way than his *Cyrano*, — the most striking feat, on the whole, that he has ever accomplished. In *Beau Brummel*, *A Parisian Romance*, *Arms and the Man*, *The Devil's Disciple*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and other plays, he has shown great skill; but, although this needed versatility, the line was to a degree the same, and his *Henry* is the first part I have seen in which he has been extremely good in a direction wholly the opposite of the one in which he tends to go. Sweetness, abundance, and ardor are not his inevitable characteristics, and he had them all as *Henry*. The work of the company was on a high level, except in the broad comedy.

Mr. Sothern's *Hamlet*, produced just before *Henry V*, I enjoyed more, although it was somewhat less ably performed. Many people who have loved tragedy in the storm and stress period find it painful when experience has made it too real. *Othello* gives me less pleasure than it did ten years ago. *Hamlet*, however, is so full of light and variety, and the tragic parts are so intellectualized, that it has all the noble and medicinal qualities of tragedy (inoculating us, as it were, to real sorrow), and lacks the depressing effects of too sustained and poignant suffering. I like it so much that I have enjoyed it when brutally butchered at the Star Theatre, where the star supposed *Caviare to the General* to be the name of a play. I believe the following story to be true.

An ambitious freshman had been stirred up over one of Charles Eliot Norton's lectures, in which the theme was the value of beauty. He approached the great man's desk.

"Professor, I feel all you say about the necessity of living for the beautiful; but how shall I learn to recognize it when I see it?"

The venerable instructor looked dreamily at the youth.

"Read *Hamlet* once a day for a month; then once a month for a year; then once a year as long as you live."

Mr. Norton seemed to have finished.

"I suppose," began the freshman, "that means that the best way to learn to know beauty is to become thoroughly familiar with some art works of the highest beauty?"

"Change my words to suit yourself," said Mr. Norton. "I have no more to say."

*Hamlet*, being not only literature, but notably an acting drama, needs only to be played as well as new dramas by Pinero or Jones, although differently, in order to show much of its stage power. Usually, with us, it is more or less murdered by all except one of the actors. By Mr. Sothern's company it was played as a fair stock company, somewhat trained to act in verse, might give it, and the result was an illuminating impression of the whole drama. Mr. Sothern proved a superior manager and was not led by his position as a star into any of the usual perversions of the play. His personal performance was not like "reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning," as Coleridge said of Kean, but the application of study, grace, and respect to a great play is as worthy a phenomenon as even the exhibition of dramatic genius. He had to endure comparisons with one of the world's first tragedians, but he proved his ability to do one of the great rôles well, and to put upon the stage with rare fidelity and even with distinction the best loved of all English masterpieces.

Ophelia was so hopelessly played by Miss Harned (Mrs. Sothern), that it needs no criticism, but I am tempted to repeat here what our foremost nervous specialist, Dr. Weir Mitchell, suggested about the way to play Ophelia in the mad scene, where she sings. Dr. Mitchell has had several patients with the same form of insanity as Ophelia, and they had certain fixed characteristics in common. They would sit up in bed and sing; but, whereas Ophelia on the stage is made to sing the songs to the end in uniform plaintive tone, these insane women sang each stanza that way until they came to the last line, but that last line was always delivered in an insane wail or shriek.

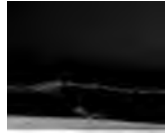
Mr. Sothern on the first night played the first scene of the third act as a cheap love episode, with a smack on the lips and a passionate kiss on the back hair. It was untragic and melodramatic to turn this scene into one of surreptitious love-making. He soon changed the effect for the better by omitting the open and passionate love. No well-known actress ought to be allowed to play Ophelia, anyway. Her part is always over-elaborated. In cutting the play, as is necessary, some of her scenes should be the first to go. The greatest fault of the general effect was that the scenic setting was so heavy that, instead of one scene following immediately on another, and thus accumulating interest, the





spectator had to be cooled by an intermission after the most fragmentary episode. Had Shakespeare lived in an age of scenery, he would have written in fewer scenes, and, as we cannot do his work over for him, cutting is a necessity. Mr. Sothern's scenery was beautiful and unobtrusive, but it did make it hard, by its breaks, to get into the swing of the story. The fault was diminished as the season progressed.

Mr. Sothern's first appearance showed at once that he looked the part to perfection, that he would read his lines well, and that each sentence would mean something in his hands. The way he brought out the pun in "I am too much i' the sun," almost his first speech, pointed and gloomy, promised a subtle study throughout. As he followed it with "Ay, madam, it is common," it was the simple, tired, and very effective admission of a commonplace. When, in his next speech, he spoke of the "windy suspiration of forced breath," he looked at the King, who had just sighed, and the result was excellent, though this tendency to point the lines with business was later overdone. The following soliloquy, like the later ones, was said with harmony and intelligence, but each of these long reflections, while full of points, is dominated by a mood that unifies them all, and in Mr. Sothern's acting the points were so distinct that the dominating pas-



sion did not always subdue them to a mere part of itself. It was like printing Shakespeare with footnotes, and making the footnotes too apparent. If his performance, as a whole, was more intelligent and accurate than powerful, this was largely the reason. His conception of the way Hamlet felt after seeing the ghost was admirable; the excitement and nervousness, which were not always in place, here fitted exactly the wild and whirling words and thoughts. Of the many possible views of this part of the play, his is surely as good as the best. Hamlet has not deeply studied with clear reason the uses of insanity as an aid to simply stabbing a king, — a hard matter, truly, to work out, — but he drops the “antic disposition” suggestion while his head and heart are so swimming that he doesn’t know what he may do or where he may land.

Hamlet’s fooling with Polonius and his talk with the players was carried off with ease and charm, but with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern he tended to come down sometimes from tragic scorn to the combative spirit of a lower form of drama. Making his father’s picture a little insistent began there. Haste showed occasionally, but that is far better than slowness, and in the main he took the right pace, so seldom seen for Shakespeare, which is much faster than for modern plays.

After the trivialized scene with Ophelia, in the

third act, he was charming in his half-boyish affection for Horatio and in his lightness before the play. The end of the play scene was a failure. Hamlet seized the King and exulted over him. Later, on the first night, Mr. Sothern followed up this idea by drawing his sword and trying to kill Claudius. A conception, which took away all the large part of Hamlet's character which makes decided action so hard for him, made necessary the omission of his entrance on Claudius at prayer, where he argues himself out of the deed, and took away all sense from Hamlet's contrast of himself and Fortinbras, which was omitted. Moreover, to suppose that Claudius would allow a man, who was continually making lunges at him, to stay about where he could stab him any moment, was hardly reasonable. The King's speeches show that he suspected Hamlet of designs against him, but are wholly inconsistent with these open attempts at assassination. Mr. Sothern apparently realized the justice of these objections and soon changed his rendering, improving it in these as in many other respects.

In the closet scene, the most splendidly theatrical, perhaps, in the whole play, he had many merits, but the substitution of moral indignation for disgust was needed, and he later made the change. Kissing the Queen was certainly futile and was soon dropped, but weeping over Polonius's dead

body was a clever explanation of Gertrude's later words, and one of those proofs of study that gave Mr. Sothern's performance so much of its charm.

As far as meaning goes, the fourth act would gain if Fortinbras were kept, no matter if Ophelia and other people were cut; but this is possibly too much to expect, and is seldom had. Goethe was among those who believed Fortinbras ought to be dropped. Mr. Sothern kept the Fortinbras end of the tragedy, but he omitted the scenes which give it meaning. Mr. Sothern showed great taste in the quarrel at Ophelia's grave and in the Osric episode, but was too much given to one unvaried look of understanding at Horatio in the grave-digger conversation. The story of Hamlet's British escapade was omitted, and it certainly is not according to nineteenth-century ethics, any more than is the prince's desire to send his stepfather to hell. The last scene of all was at least picturesque, and the manner in which the swords were changed was the best among those which I have seen — the same idea as Bernhardt's, much better executed. Mr. Sothern felt the scratch of Laertes's sword, saw the trick, purposely disarmed him, and politely handed him the blunted foil. The end would have been better if the meaning of Fortinbras had been brought out earlier in the play.

What was most needed in general was an increase in the dignity of tragedy, especially in the first two acts, which had many motions and ejaculations in which brusqueness came with something of a jar. The picture of his father was so constantly used as to seem paltry. The scream when the ghost disappeared was veracious enough, but startled the nerves more than the imagination. Also the sudden turn to the tablets after "Catch the conscience of the King," which was an intelligent idea, was in effect nearly comic, and should be wild and terrible. The only blot on the magnificently acted first scene with the players was the business over the real tear, which was not a large enough effect to fit this play. Realism, at the expense of beauty, is no motto to fit poetic tragedy.

*Hamlet* to me was a joy even when I saw it at the Grand Opera House. Through the performance, sometimes fair, sometimes mistaken, the drama loomed like a mighty ruin, putting into insignificance the trifling things about it. With the literary quality of the language somewhat lacerated, the situations stood out alone not only in their imaginative greatness, but in their perfect marriage to the conditions of the stage. The Hamlet, Mr. Louis James, preferred in many cases his own words to those of Shakespeare, and his knowledge of the meaning in detail may be illus-

trated by a delivery like this, "On this fair mountain leave, to feed and batten on this moor"; by the Lawrence Barrett ending of the closet scene, "Mother! My son! Mother! Mother!" followed by hugging; by such metrical improvements as "Take up arms against a siege (of course) of troubles," and by a hundred things; yet he did have a coherent conception of the part he was playing, and an interesting conception. His Hamlet was very sad, with a sadness not lightened by humor. The cloud-camel-weasel playing with Polonius was acted as if it cut the Prince to the heart, and the bitter irony of the dialogue during the mock play was made grave reproach. None the less Mr. James's Hamlet was real; it was acted with dignity and distinctness, and in places it was almost strong.

The crowd, used to cheap performances, liked the occasional ranting best, and illustrated the dangers actors run when they play to popular-priced humanity. The hit of the evening was the First Player, who raised the audience to frenzy by his bellowing and sawing of the air. Now and then Mr. James showed the influence of such audiences, but not often. "It is awfully interesting," said a spectator, "and everything, though we can't hear all his words, and everything; he acted it just elegant."

As Hazlitt says, "It is *we* who are Hamlet." Not only we men, but we human beings: so one of the conspicuous Hamlets of our day has been created by Sarah Bernhardt. It has been very highly praised, and nobody appeals to me more powerfully than the flamboyant French actress, but her Dane seemed to me wholly novel, and nearly absurd.

"Genius, the Pythian of the Beautiful,  
Leaves her large truth a riddle to the dull;  
From eyes profane a veil the Isis screens,  
And fools on fools still ask — what Hamlet means."

It is not only fools, however, who ask the question, and Bulwer himself, the author of the fling, would probably have had to restate the meaning of the tragedy, for his own steadiness, had he been present when the aggregation of artists from Paris got through playing football with it. He might even be tempted to ask if it meant anything. There is no poetry, no tragedy, not a great deal of psychology or sense — only a grotesque and diverting play with a central figure consisting of a strange youth, full of inconsequential temperament, likely to sing gayly one moment and hurl a book at Polonius the next, characterized far more by pervading and undirected energy than by the pale cast of thought. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern assert that Hamlet received

them most like a gentleman. Our Gallic prince pounds their heads together in an amiable and sporty mood — gentlemanly, no doubt, since manners are as local and temporary as clothes, but hardly the mode of expression looked for by Anglo-Saxon audiences in the embodiment of philosophy and intellectual distinction. All due care should be taken before calling any study, by so keen a student as Madame Bernhardt, absurd. It must be remembered that she wholly lacks the waves on waves of gorgeous sound and imagery whose cumulative power is so much of Shakespeare's magic. She must speak a clever but slight and unimaginative prose, which sounds in English ears like a jews'-harp after an organ. She is dealing, also, with a northern imagination, barbaric to her countrymen, who see not the central unity of spirit in the tragedy, but the variety of illustration, which they deem roughness and caprice. We have no right to demand that, because Booth was great and we are English, Hamlet shall have for his most prominent note a national brand of reflective melancholy. He may be many other things, but there are certain bounds within which he must remain, even in French. Surely there must be some suggestion of John-a-Dreams, some struggle between the reflective instinct and the duty to act, some *welt-schmerz*. Bernhardt's Hamlet is less intellectual than instructive, intuitive,



and feminine; and his instincts and intuitions are not elevated. The actress seems to seek after an escape from the conventional at the expense of ordinary sense; as when, for instance, in *c'était votre mari* and in *c'est votre mari*, she puts the stress emphatically on *votre*. Again, in making the ghost appear in the portrait in the closet scene, she destroys the whole meaning of the lines. The Queen would naturally think Hamlet was talking about his father as seen in the picture, when he stands and points directly at that presentation of him. He is not bending his eye on vacancy at all. Also the mannerisms which the great actress permits herself in the use of her voice fit this tragedy very ill. Miss Robins, in a very intelligent and convincing article on Madame Bernhardt's performance, thus touches the memory of Booth: "We Americans were long ago shown a Hamlet who taught us that, however high an ideal the imagination might conjure up, it might yet fall short of a great actor's power to body forth a noble sympathy with noble things. That Hamlet of ours, who being dead yet speaketh, is, half unconsciously to ourselves, still the standard by which we measure the acted play. Sitting in the Adelphi Theatre, I heard again the voice of Edwin Booth soaring out beyond Madame Bernhardt's and filling the distances she made no attempt to sound." And we Americans have no

need to go so far back as Edwin Booth. The Hamlet of Edward Sothorn has reaches of dignity and beauty with which the clever performance of the Frenchwoman makes no competition. She, indeed, has nothing within that passeth show. Again let me draw upon the happy words of the American actress: "No facile use of frowns and sighs and moody airs can convey the mortal heaviness that Booth put into the lines:—

" ' Oh, God ! God !  
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world ! ' "

" Booth made a great effort by rousing himself out of his hushed and awed absorption into a sudden fierce energy at: —

" ' Haste me to know 't, that I, with wings as swift  
As meditation or the thoughts of love,  
May sweep to my revenge — ' "

with a great upward flight of the voice that made you think of an eagle cleaving black cloud masses before a storm."

If Sir Henry Irving undertook to play *Mascarille* and made him act like *Faust*, the divergence would hardly be greater. *Bernhardt* is farther, much farther, from *Hamlet* than *Miss Adams* is from *Reichstadt*. Not the strongest interest in her professional skill and her strange cleverness can pass over her utter failure to get

anything out of the part. Her Hamlet is — as far, indeed, as he is anything — a pert, ill-mannered, spoiled, bad-tempered boy, with little sense and a theatrical temperament. Grant him youth; that is a legitimate interpretation. In this version Yorick's skull has lain in the earth sixteen years instead of three and twenty, and Hamlet is apparently twenty-three years old. He is the most wayward and incomprehensible individual of his years, or any years, ever seen. He takes information about ghosts, and the sight of them, now with matter-of-fact attention, now with some start to show that the incident is really strange. He orders the apparition, in a tone of cold command, to speak, as he will go no farther, and then suddenly, a few moments later, at "If ever thou didst thy poor father love," has an eruption of filial reverence. He turns his back twice brutally on Polonius to show him what a bore he is, treats him with exaggerated contempt throughout, and says "These tedious old fools," as if it were a passionately serious expression of disgust. The discovery of the trickery of Guildenstern and Rosencrantz is made very obvious. Whenever Bernhardt discovers anything she doesn't like going on at Elsinore, she expresses it "aside" in a way that would attract the attention of everybody in the palace. With the players she is sketchy, quick, and without any manner of weight or seriousness. The

play scene is almost a burlesque. Instead of "lying down at Ophelia's feet," this Hamlet lies in her lap, and makes such amorous pastime that the court, of most wooden supernumeraries, might be expected to glance at the couple now and then. Hamlet rolls on the floor in glee, and climbs up the sheer side of a balcony to stare with fiendish exultation in the King's face. Nobody notices these monkey antics. Apparently it doesn't matter there. There the rest are as mad as he. In the closet scene Hamlet says, "Is it the King?" and "Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool!" as if he said, "Oh, fiddlesticks, who is it, anyway?" In the graveyard he is rather curious than melancholy, and in the scene at the end theatrically effective, but stagey, making another elongated and emphatic wait over the discovery that one of the foils is unsheathed.

It is almost needless to say that the French genius does many details well. The scene of swearing on the sword is beautifully picturesque. In the third act the "to be, or not to be" soliloquy is given simply and nobly, and the scene with Ophelia is marred only by the silly exaggeration of Hamlet's start when he discovers Polonius. In the "now might I do it pat" scene, the moody and revengeful boy fits the lines well enough, and, indeed, this Hamlet, the older one, of revenge and broad comedy, is given

fully by Madame Bernhardt, while the poetic and philosophic one, which Shakespeare fused with the old material, is wholly omitted. The result is as unworthy of Bernhardt's talent as are some of her exhibitions in Sardou. A detail, used alike by her and by Mr. Sothern, is having each curtain fall on some snappy gesture or bit of business, to give the idea of continuation after the curtain — surely an undignified and trivial effort after realism.

Three Juliets were given to America in the season of 1898-99. The least conspicuous, and, in my opinion, the best, was by an actress principally known in soubrette rôles, Odette Tyler. In a cheap company she acted Portia and Desdemona absurdly. These parts absolutely require something of the grand style, something noble and dignified, while a very good Juliet, as Juliets go, can be made out of mere girlish sincerity and grace. Miss Tyler lacked authority. The great mind and feeling of the poet were not in her words and form, but the mind and feeling of Juliet were. She showed an inability to handle elaborate metaphor, much of which, indeed, she cut, and there were numerous inaccuracies in prosody. She was entirely sincere. She tried for nothing that she could not make her own. What she could not understand and reproduce, she left out, but much re-

mained. It was a girlish heroine absolutely. Whether Juliet was really fourteen, and what that would correspond to in a northern climate, are questions infinitely discussed, but this performance showed at least how well extreme youth suits the action and the words. In the mouth of a serious, passionate child the exaggerated statements sounded proper and real, and had there been a corresponding Romeo, the effect would have been delightful. Even in the intensity of the potion scene Miss Tyler's earnest truth gave the impression of genuine childlike hysteria.

One point about blank verse was noticeable. It is an excellence in that form of poetry that the accent should come where the sound calls for emphasis. Therefore Miss Tyler, being true to her feeling, was usually correct in her verse. But whenever a change in accent from the habit of to-day was called for by the metre, she entirely missed it. Possibly had she had an intelligent manager, who would have done away with the bad company, the awful business of reviving at the end, the foolish changes in the lines, Miss Tyler's Juliet, now soon to be forgot, might have lived in history.

The most discussed of the three Juliets appeared at the Empire Theatre, in New York, May 8, 1899. It was an immense "occasion,"

because it marked the first Shakespearian efforts of several popular actors and one influential manager. Singularly enough, perhaps, the best results sprang from the arrangement, the worst from the acting.

The tragedy itself was respected. Whoever selected the scenes and lines to give and those to omit, behaved with much taste. Nobody collaborated with Shakespeare. Nobody brought him up to date. The scenes came in the order he chose, the lines were those which he saw fit to write. Of course the whole tragedy could not be given. It is a misfortune to lose many of the scenes which frame the fate of two lovers in the ample story of families at war, thus giving a broad and sane background to the intense central interest. It is a misfortune, however, which the introduction of scenery and naturalistic acting, instead of rapid elocution, made necessary; and as these scenes are the poorest in literary style, it was as well that they were chosen for the sacrifice, if any must go. Even if it were not so, the nature of theatrical people would end the play with the death of the two stars, and if it is to end there the scene of the prince's doom and other links are needless. Keeping in several short scenes necessary to the coherence of the love story, such as the meeting and explanation between the friars, was an illustration of the intel-

ligence at work in choosing the parts to perform. Only one scene of real beauty was omitted, the one in which Juliet's love of family meets her love for Romeo and is overthrown, and that is such an unwelcome obstacle, to modern feeling, in the progress of the drama, that its excision is discreet. In the whole play only one word, as far as I noticed, was changed. Juliet's age was made sixteen instead of fourteen. In the poem from which Shakespeare took most of the play, she was sixteen, and in the novel eighteen. In making the change he doubtless had her Italian nature in mind, and he wished to make it a tragedy of almost childhood; but when everything is converted on the stage into Anglo-Saxon, this return is harmonious. The retention of some of the bustling incidental scenes was particularly praiseworthy.

I put so much emphasis on the treatment of the play itself because that is far more important, apart from the mere gossip interest in Miss Smith and Mr. Brown, than the success of this or that actor in any rôle. It was easily the best feature of this famous performance. It allowed the play to do its own work, to bring tears or happiness quite independent of the actors.

The acting was seldom poor enough to take everything from the words and situations, and never good enough to lend anything to them.



The competence of the minor players did much for the general impression, and the lack of inspiration and thorough grasp in the leading actors was partly atoned for by faithfulness and lack of aggressive faults. To see a nurse who verged on the endurable, a Capulet who was a brute without quite reaching rant, a Peter and an apothecary who played no more than their parts, and so on through the lesser members of the cast, saved many jars. In the leading actors, too, there was nothing shocking, but as more was required more gaps were felt. Miss Adams in the opening scene was charming. The birth of love in a girl, its daring, its timidity, curiosity, and archness, all were done by her with a mobility of face and appropriateness of action that were matched by simplicity and truth of delivery. But love once born requires another set of powers, especially if it is a flaming southern love that blazes at every shade into poetry and burns so deep and thoroughly that death is its only artistic climax. Juliet without tropical luxuriance, without an expanding, self-forgetting passion, a childish rioting in bursting feelings and correspondingly exaggerated language, takes out the soul from the tragedy. From the moment that she cries, in the first act, "If he be married, my grave is like to be my wedding bed," and, just after, "My only love sprung from my only hate,"

the big, lowering clouds have appeared behind the golden flashes, to encroach ever more and more upon them until the final knell; and then nothing will serve but passion which rises to all this awful setting and tones growing ever deeper and more tragic. Miss Adams worked faithfully to the end, and did most of what her temperament and experience of life admitted. What could spring from study and stage training was usually sufficient. But just as she was the type of a fetching young girl at first she was at the end, and she was nothing more. Love, which had timidly flickered into life in the first act, burned with no melting blaze in the third. If there is no deepening from act to act in Juliet and in Romeo, what is there left? A pretty love story, to be sure, and that is all. Although this is too fundamental for any thorough change, Miss Adams might have done a few things to come nearer to her end. She might have remembered that grief, almost unbearable grief, rules the parting in the third act, and that even in the second—in the balcony scene—sweet sorrow, a sense of danger that finds it all too rash, too unadvised, too sudden, is not to be expressed by smiles and easy cheerfulness. She was much too light and quick, paused too little, elaborated and embroidered her feelings too little. She could have made some steps forward by ruthlessly trampling

on the kind of shallow sweetness which so easily captures an audience; remembering that dark omens are hanging amid Juliet's hopes, and making her heart speak not in ingénue smiles, but in the swelling accents of fear and love and passion.

Mr. Faversham's Romeo, on the contrary, grew, on the whole, better as the situations deepened. His opening scenes needed lightening. "Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo," says Mercutio, after Romeo has outdone him in a display of verbal pyrotechnics. The witty and gallant Romeo, loving his own skill in the flowery language of sentiment and the sparkling conceits of forced humor, should have no touch of true seriousness before the meeting with Juliet. All is airy moonshine then, or equally airy persiflage. "This love feel I, that feel no love in this. Dost thou not laugh?" He teaches even Mercutio to be more mercurial.

Then his doom strikes. In the first sight of Juliet, and in the sudden change of Romeo into a man for whom life was big with good and evil, Mr. Faversham was more at home by nature; but he lacked training, and apparently had not studied as hard as Miss Adams. The words seemed strange to him. He was ashamed of some of them, slurring and holding down the language when it was inclined to soar, and sub-

stituting gesture and motion for the straight and open delivery of the lines that is the Shakespearian actor's first task. The story is all in the old poem of Brooke. What Shakespeare did was to glorify the expression, and the young modern actor who will play Shakespeare must rejoice in this luxuriance of speech, and learn to prefer poetry to naturalism. Mr. Faversham had earnestness and even ardor, but somehow the ardor seemed to belong more to romantic melodrama than to dramatic poetry, and he seemed carried along by his will more than spurred and filled by the lines he was using. He was best in the climaxes. Where he killed Tybalt, and the new-born gentleness of his nature mingled with the fire of sudden vengeance, he was admirable. In the even greater opportunity of the opening scene in the last act he was so good in moments that only a little was needed to make the whole impressive. When Romeo learns that all is over, he has felt so deeply that calm is his only possible expression. "Is it even so? Then I defy you, stars. Thou know'st my lodgings." The quiet, immediate decision and sudden change Mr. Faversham did well. To carry out the idea of the calmness of resolve and final experience, as the expression of the deepest despair, a kind of absent reflective spirit ought to play in a dazed sort of way through his mind when he gives the

long apothecary speech with all its details, and Mr. Faversham was much too matter of fact.

The third Juliet was Julia Arthur. Her production never reached New York. It relied for success more on trappings than on essentials. The scenery and dresses were magnificent beyond the dreams of the most wide-eyed lover of the spectacular. As an exhibit in itself, this display might receive praise. As an embellishment to *Romeo and Juliet* it was a hopeless misfortune. Scenery cannot make a tragedy, but it can help to ruin one. Had the best Romeo and the best Juliet ever seen performed in the midst of such vast and unexampled scenic luxuriance, they would by necessity have lost effect in direct proportion as the scenery gained it. The smothering influence of this riotous series of conspicuous pictures was made far worse by the incomprehensible blunder of having the orchestra make a loud and presumably sentimental noise all through the most beautiful passages. The effect of this was precisely in the same direction as that of the scenic display, only worse in degree. It didn't seem to be *Romeo and Juliet* acted so much as *Romeo and Juliet* set to scenery and music. The crowds that swarmed in the streets during the opening scene, the great number of actors who danced a minuet at Capulet's entertainment, the

horde of Capulet and Montague servants in the fight scene, all jerked the spectators' attention inevitably from the central interest of the play to its clothing. The greater part of the applause, indeed, when I saw it, was for the scenery.

The play was not taken any liberties with as far as general treatment and the arrangement of scenes are concerned, but there were a few interpolated words, not so important in themselves as in the indication they made of the impatience to be doing and saying things which marks many American actors of to-day. To act dramas of the more stately sort it is necessary to be able to make effects by broad and calm methods, by attitude and gesture, as well as by dignified and musical delivery. Had Mr. W. S. Hart been playing Romeo in the manner of tragedy rather than of melodrama, he would not have felt the need of exclaiming "Shame!" when Tybalt killed Mercutio, or of saying "O mischief, thou art swift, swift to enter into the thoughts of dangerous men." In Miss Arthur's case, too, when she put in little words not in the text, while they did no salient harm, they tended to substitute vivacity for beauty. Everybody in the cast moved about too much. Motion and gesture should be measured not by the amount but by the meaning. In delivery there was the same tendency to substitute what would doubtless be called a natural way

of speaking for a musical one. People don't talk in verse, but the greatest tragedies are written in verse, for reasons of beauty and elevation, not of realism, and whoever would play them must give up the fetich naturalism. Lines ought not to be chopped up into separate phrases. A man with an ear for verse, but no acquaintance with *Romeo and Juliet*, could hardly have told when prose was being spoken and when poetry.

Of the individual performances Miss Arthur's was the best. Her voice, which was beautiful and strong, was used with effect in the potion scene, in which her other technical resources also showed well. It is really a case of hysteria, but Miss Arthur's substitute of intense thought rising only for a moment into keen terror was given with strength. Her death scene was sweet, simple, but without poignancy. Throughout she had beauty, but lacked light and shade and passion, and in the early light scenes she was heavy.

## CHAPTER X

IBSEN

WHILE it seems unlikely that he will ever be popular in this country, Ibsen has, first and last, been played here a good deal. *A Doll's House* is, of course, the favorite. *John Gabriel Borkman*, although presented only at special performances, gave general satisfaction, largely perhaps through the remarkable power of the late E. J. Henley in the title rôle.

*The Masterbuilder*, which was played by the Independent Company at Carnegie Lyceum, was not well received by the audience, for the sufficient reason that very few had even the most primitive comprehension of the meaning, or, in any adequate sense, of the story. For this mystification there were several causes. The play itself is among the most illusive, in some of its phases, of Ibsen's dramas, although its general character-plot is clear and strong. The version used was not tactful. The third and principal reason is that the central character, which gives the whole dramatic motive to the play, was played without one illuminating flash, with so heavy and unvaried a touch that disaster was in-



evitable. Had this personality been shot into the auditorium with the power which made *John Gabriel Borkman* so real to New York a few years earlier, *The Masterbuilder* might have been recognized for the great play it is. The others were all competent, Florence Kahn superb; but Solness can no more be deadened without killing the play than *Hedda Gabler* could be understood with Lillian Russell in the title part. Miss Kahn's Hilda was inspiring. She came on like a strong embodiment of dream and hope and youth. She seemed to radiate light and happiness. She understood her part. She seemed to be a poet. A little too abrupt at times, she was in essentials, and in most details, remarkable in a day of unpoetic acting.

The same company earlier gave *Ghosts*, in which Courtenay Thorpe had formerly starred in America. One look about the hall on the opening night testified to the place held by Ibsen in the modern world. In one box sat the most prominent man of letters then in New York. In another was one of our best-known dramatic authors. Scattered through the house was a greater representation of the world of the various arts than is often seen in an American theatre. There were a few professional literary impotents, commonly called cranks, but the gathering was, on the whole, one of the most

cultivated in appearance I have ever seen. It represented the submerged tenth, the tenth that is submerged in our theatrical system, the colleges, the arts, and the kind of humanity generally that has heard of Marlowe and read Browning. What did this audience think of this play, prepared especially for them? The most distinguished man present thought it made all other kinds of art seem dead. Men and women as they passed out talked not only about strength in structure and in the performance, and, of course, about "truth," but even about beauty. This impression was made by the first two acts and dampened by the third.

Now it is easy to condemn sweepingly and outright a class of art with which one happens to lack temperamental sympathy, and it is pleasanter to the really observant mind to extract the kernel of power and life from any superior specimen of whatever artistic genus may lie before it. Nevertheless, the fundamental bourgeois facts of human emotion in the aggregate cannot be wholly neglected; and when the voice of the people condemns *Ghosts*, it seems to me well founded. If we had to choose between baby prettiness and cruel masculine strength, between *Colinette*, *A Colonial Girl*, and *Rosemary* on the one hand, and *Ghosts* on the other, why, the Ibsen power would be chosen without a waver, and horror made real

by genius would seem less horrible than the dead vacuity of virtuous inanity. It happens, however, in this best of all possible worlds, that no such choice is necessary, and we are allowed to keep our prejudice in favor of genius pointing to the sun against genius expounding the events of the charnel-house. Ibsen, in the generous bulk of his creation, has done both; even in this play he does both, but in its resultant it is a debauch, in which the light is only a glimmer among the corpses, and the saner part of the theme is often hidden. For this reason it seems to me to rank much below *The Masterbuilder*.

For two acts, however, the skill of the dramatist, unsurpassed if not unequalled by any other living to-day, takes a firmer and firmer hold with every touch. The first act begins so slowly, yet withal so ominously. No deeds are done, the words are common, yet every moment some ray of impending trouble seems shot forward from the past, until by the time the curtain falls the way has been almost imperceptibly prepared for the full striking of the awful lesson: the mother who has lied to her son, and the priest whose breath is hypocrisy, stand together almost dumb as they see in the distance the son repeating the very situation that had marked the depravity of the father. "Ghosts! Ghosts!" whispers the mother, and the curtain falls.

So in the next act, while the relentless skill of the sombre critic of life is busied in stripping to the very skeleton the miserable creatures before him, genius seems to be its own excuse, and we follow the invisibly yet swiftly marching drama with a fascination that contains much healthy interest in the embodied sermon. As the maimed youth pours out the story of his poisoned life in broken masses to a mother who knows so well the hopeless truth of what he says, that she herself orders the drink which is part of his solace and of his curse, we feel that perhaps this truth is deep enough in its sadness, magnificent enough in the chasms of its horror, to fall within the art which enriches and not impoverishes the wretched race of man. But then comes a last act, adding nothing to the spiritual message, which is already fully told, but piling up before the unwilling spectator a lot of horror that, instead of driving into his soul the meaning of the play, turns the mind wearily off to the fairer truths in which it has lived before. The gods approve the depth and not the tumult of the soul. The last act of *Ghosts* spoils the play by adding immeasurably to what was already too much.

For this misfortune the actors were partly, although not primarily, to blame. Mary Shaw, who up to this time had acted with that entrancing perfection which she has so often shown,

abandoned restraint and pounded in her effects ; and John Blair, who had combined a well-managed intensity with some taint of monotony, now showed real power malapropos, successfully carrying out a horror which added to the mistakes of the drama and helped to hide its better nature. The acting as a whole was refreshingly able. Mr. Blair showed straight power, as well as the calm distinction which he always has ; but he forgot that a part to be kept in one key need not therefore lack shading. He could have learned this from Miss Shaw, who, if distinctly inferior to him in the last act, reached the very life of taste and skill in her long speech in the first, and in the multitudinous difficulties of those first two acts. Sincerity is very well, and many actors have it ; but without completed means, it is nothing. Miss Shaw has such a mastery of method that every bit of reality in her was in the major part of the play held up in its proper setting. She is technically one of the few most accomplished actresses in America, and as she used in this play the open manner of acting, although she is mistress of both extremes, one blow was delivered to the notion that free gestures and a generalized manner are inappropriate to Ibsen.

Earlier than these two experiments was *Hedda Gabler*, played once at the Fifth Avenue in the spring of 1898 by Miss Elizabeth Robins, and it

failed to interest the public enough to lead Miss Robins to continue contemplated Ibsen experiments. The play and the performance had what Hedda herself sought so fiercely and so blindly, intellectual distinction, an escape from the commonplace. Ibsen, whatever else he may be, is always a man of power; and Miss Robins showed, besides sufficient technical resources, a mind subtle and vivid, which followed the character into every nook, and held it up distinct and striking. Ibsen's method in Hedda and that group of plays is to distil the poetry that there is in prose, to force elemental feelings to emerge from the material of every day. However much he succeeds, he has influenced his fellow-dramatists more than any other playwright since the author of *La Femme de Claude*.

I have frequently heard it said that actors do not fail in Ibsen, which is but a slight exaggeration. The reservation is that, as Ibsen's dialogue is tight, elusive, full of veiled suggestions, one may put admirable gifts and training into one of his characters and yet lose what is best—that touch of imaginative light without which he has no glory higher than superb stage-craft. The danger, which lies alongside this opportunity, is partly made by the narrow bridge often walked by the author between the imaginative and the ridiculous. In plays where he extracts his signifi-

cance and beauty from material which the greatest dramatists have usually avoided, he frequently comes to places where the actor needs abundant tact. *Hedda Gabler* has a number of such pitfalls, and Miss Robins skilfully avoided them. How much of Ibsen's method is due to the place of his birth, it is not easy to decide; but dramatists of the future are likely to learn from his almost unrivalled exposition and his strange poetry, and let alone his attempt to prove that a silk purse may be made as readily from one substance as from another.

Hedda Gabler herself is a type better known in America than many of Ibsen's women—far better than Hilda, for instance, in *The Master-builder*. Hedda hates the commonplace and fancies that it lies more than it does in the circumstances of the outer world. The people about her jar her nerves, and paltry instincts, when they are hers, are taken by her for superiority. Married to a scholar, she chaffs at his interest in his specialty. Entering an atmosphere of bourgeois morality, she finds there only ennui. What is her idea of a more real life? Apparently, for a man to shoot himself through the temple, instead of the abdomen, or to make a man get drunk, as a tribute to her power. She likes things intellectually melodramatic. Gretchen or Ophelia in real life would bore her. She is

excited because her husband's position is endangered by competition. It looks like a game, and there is fun in a game. She likes to think of her flirtation with Loevberg because it is daring. She leads him to shoot himself, because it is a "bold act." This is the material of which Ibsen has made a few of his most famous plays. In the greatest dramas such a person is subordinated, as she is in life. Hedda is the centre of the play. "Make your hero a King," said Aristotle. "Don't take a special interest," one might say, in a modern version. "Mirror life in its perspective. Let the big things be big, and the little things, little." There is nothing artistically inevitable in *Hedda Gabler*.

Of course the technique is magical. The play moves as swiftly as it does quietly. The inextricable juncture of the exposition and the narrative is fascinating. Nothing is told that is not told as a necessity of the present, and yet each part of the past is furnished as it is needed. Each move wraps the interest, until the spectator is enthralled. Little seems to be going on, and yet how long it would take to tell all that happens on the stage. Take the awful part played by Hedda's unborn child, for instance. How she winces every time her husband speaks of her looking "flourishing." How she shudders again, with a grim determination that it shall not be, when some one speaks of



the "normal responsibilities" that are coming to her. How bitterly all the talk about Loevberg's book being Mrs. Elvsted's child is connected with her own vision of the future. The haughty, contemptuous, nervous Hedda, narrow and essentially small, yet fascinating, because of her personal domination, intensity, and hot longing, was done with intensity and clearness by Miss Robins, and the scholar, who is innocent of the drama going on before his very eyes, sweet, unsuspecting, simple, was given to the life by Leo Ditrichstein. He is a singularly brilliant counterpart to Hedda, this man who sits down with another woman, to begin another unselfish literary task, ten minutes before the intensity about him explodes in a pistol shot through his wife's temple.

Blanche Bates gave *Hedda Gabler* at a matinée in Washington, in the fall of 1900, and I went down to see it. When Miss Bates came to New York, in the last year of the Daly régime, she took the town at once, through her natural power combined with finish gained by playing many parts in the West, and naturally there was trouble between her and Mr. Daly, and she left to play Miladi in *The Musketeers*. These two performances made her a New York favorite, and she increased her vogue in *Naughty Anthony* and *Madame Butterfly*. Then she took an engagement for six weeks with this Washington stock


company. Ibsen has always been an interest of hers, and she was the actress who introduced *A Doll's House* to the Pacific coast.

The reasons that special performances of Ibsen are so important in this country that I would go a long distance to see one are that he is, at least in influence, the foremost dramatist of our day, and that the opportunities for seeing him on the stage in this country are almost wholly confined to occasional productions. *A Doll's House* has had something of a record in our theatres, — Mrs. Mansfield, Mrs. Fiske, Janet Achurch, and Sorma having played it in New York, and Miss Bates and others in the West; but apart from this one play none has entered the consciousness of the general public. What the future holds for Ibsen in the Anglo-Saxon world is unsettled. In the meantime, no other living dramatist arouses so keen an intellectual interest; none is more highly praised or more vigorously condemned.

The performance of *Hedda Gabler* in Washington was not as able, taken all round, as the one in which Miss Robins played the title rôle. Blanche Bates, however, gave a striking exhibition in the central part. It was not as subtle and intricate as the character was portrayed by Miss Robins, but it had sheer force and plausibility. Miss Bates's Hedda might be taken for a straight devil, without any sympathetic appeal, and she

even cut some lines which suggest that Hedda had at least a tinge of imagination. As a sample of pure wickedness, she would be hard to beat. She truly, as the dime novels say, "laughed like a fiend" when she had already destroyed the soul of Loevberg and was busily employed before the fire destroying his life's work. She was fierce and terrible to a high degree. Her Hedda did not have intellect and reflection like the one acted by Miss Robins. She was perhaps more plausible, because it would seem to require an utterly depraved or half-insane villany to do the things Hedda does. It would be absurd to call either the only right conception of the part.

Miss Bates's woman was more like an American than that of her predecessor. Her flirting with Brack left no doubt that it was the real thing, and that she was what is known in literature as "a dangerous woman." So when she stood in the window and fired her pistols over Brack's head, she was a most admirable devil—as she was when she took a "sporting interest" in the probable contest between her husband and her one-time lover. The awful thoughts about her expected child naturally sat harmoniously on this conception. Miss Bates believes that insanity shows in Hedda from almost the time the book is compared to a child, but this insane element is not clearly brought out in her acting.




One mark of the great playwright is never absent from Ibsen. He writes excellent parts. Brack, Loevberg, and Tesman are such good rôles that whether an actor gets the imaginative side of them or not, it is hard not to make a practical hit in them. It is easy to get more distress than help from *Hedda Gabler*, but who could help being held by the story without a moment's slackening of interest? Whether or not he is a great thinker, Ibsen is surely a great playwright.

## CHAPTER XI

### FOREIGN TRAGEDY

AMONG the contemporary tragedies from foreign tongues which have recently been acted in America, the greatest by far is Tolstoi's *Power of Darkness*, and it is hard not to believe that it will sometime be presented to our public more adequately. The opportunity of seeing it once, translated, and acted by students, was due to Mr. Sargent, the head of our leading school of acting.

Miss Isabel Hapgood translated it into language too correct to help the idea of dense ignorance in the speakers. She or the management made over the admirable character of Akim. In this version he was an ordinary pious old man, without the contrast which gives his dramatic character in the original, his helplessness with words baffling the expression of his spiritual vision. The inability properly to cast Marinka led to a loss of breadth of presentation in the omission of Nikita's scene with Marinka and the weakening of the whole Marinka motive. If this play is ever given here again, it should not be



made thin out of respect either to false shame or to our dislike of the horrible. Marinka's wrongs, Aniutka's horrible treatment, Matryona's brutality to Anisya after the crime—all these things are needed to fill out not only the characters but the meaning of the play. Only three acts were played, and these three acts, or what was played of them, made an impression of tremendous power and called loudly for the climax of horror in the fourth act and the completion of the moral in the fifth.


What makes this, in all probability, the greatest tragedy since Goethe and Schiller (to be cautious in statement), is not only the massive intellectual clarity and force, but also a sense of the stage requirements surprising in one who has given comparatively little attention to the theatre. This dramatic sense is less acute than Ibsen's, but Tolstoi is so incomparably clearer and stronger as a thinker and more final as a creator of character that the total dramatic effect of this tragedy is far higher than anything of the Norwegian's, as it is beyond *Fuhrmann Henschel*, or anything else with which it can fitly be compared.

It is far easier to act in this species of play than in the opposite extreme, but it is no less true that very great actors could find use for the deepest suggestions in these characters and situations. A fair performance gives enough to let the play

make its effect in the main. A great performance would find room in almost any one of the persons, and of course would bring out the tragedy in higher lights, darker shades, and deeper truth.

Another Russian tragedy saw the light in America for a few performances through the efforts of the Independent Theatre Company, which had its headquarters for two years at Carnegie Lyceum in New York. Ostrovsky's *The Storm* is so foreign, and its conditions so special, that I was sure I missed much of it; but the English translation of it in book form made me believe that it was a really strong tragedy, informed with a large and simple idea, ably carried out dramatically, and the stage performance of it, although the play then seemed vaguer and less effective in climaxes, still left the impression of vividness and distinction. I read Tolstoi's *Power of Darkness* just after *The Storm*, and the stupendous power of that terrible play for a little while made Ostrovsky's seem rather faint; but the later impression, made up by comparison with the general experiences of a regular theatre-goer, left me with enthusiasm for a drama which left a real impression settled on my mind.

*The Storm* is one of the most successful plays of Ostrovsky, and he stands, I believe, in general reputation, at the top of Russian dramatists. To



the American audience *The Storm* was much more comprehensible than Ibsen's *Masterbuilder*, for instance, and for a simple enough reason. Take away the symbolism from Ostrovsky's drama, and a direct and clear story of love and death remains. Take away the mystic significance of Ibsen's masterpiece, and the incidents, dramatic as they are, lack what is known as common sense.

The meaning of *The Storm* is hinted by its title. The play shows the workings, on a sensitive and imaginative nature, of a rough and quarrelsome environment. Although the particular conditions are Russian, the central theme is clear enough to Westerners. These foreign plays must always be taken *mutatis mutandis*, and in this case the adjustment is not difficult. Of the elements, hostile to her own nature, which storm about the young wife, the most important are the mother-in-law, who uses most absolutely the arbitrary power granted to parents by Russian customs; a husband, who is submissive, dogged, sodden, weak, and drunk; a sister-in-law, who is sly and lax; and the uncle of the young wife's lover, who, again with the power which seems so strange to us, sends his nephew to Siberia under such conditions that his mistress must be left behind. This is the last touch, and she drowns herself, on the verge of insanity. The breaking down of the young woman's mind is made rather



sudden in Paul Kester's translation, but it was necessary to shorten the play, and putting the last two acts into one seemed as good a way as could be thought of. The impatience of audiences to-day, making the five-act tragedy difficult, is one of the greatest limitations to contemporary drama. The customs of those who dine at eight or even seven, have much artistic degeneration to answer for.

Another change in Mr. Kester's translation was obviously wise. He has left out many long speeches which are in the original for the purpose of giving the conditions, local color, or whatever you choose to call it, full expression. They would not have interested the American audience, and would have made the play drag.

The theme of the tragedy is in brief this: arbitrary family power, combined with ignorance, the total absence of sweetness and spiritual light, make the heroine, with all her strong conscience, seek comfort in a lover. The rough condemnation which follows her voluntary confession drives her onward to madness and death. Meantime, the same spiritual conditions are pushing the stupid husband deeper in drink, the lover off to Siberia, the sister-in-law to sly indulgence in a freedom which will end with marriage. These conditions are drawn with a largeness of view which gives the drama its place in Russian literature.

Technically, from the stage point of view, it is more difficult to judge this drama than it is to feel in reading it that it is literature. We do not know really how it ought to be acted. Some things missed fire which ought to have been effective, and yet it would not be easy to say how they should have been done. The characters are not drawn nearly as distinctly as the environment and atmosphere, and this counts heavily in the effect of the dramatic situations. Probably Russians could fill in the points not made explicit by the dramatist. The whole result might fairly be summed up thus: the drama was far more vivid alive and intellectually interesting than most of the plays which we get, but it in no place gave the emotional elements of great power. There is no doubt that it was an admirable choice, however, to carry out the idea of showing dramas with high artistic qualities.

Next to the Russians in power come the Germans, of whose work, thanks to the Irving Place Theatre, and, secondarily, to the Bowery playhouses, we see considerable. At the head of German dramatists stands Hauptmann, only two of whose dramas have been given in English, in my experience, although *Hannele* was played earlier, and failed.

*Die Versunkene Glocke* was played by Mr.

Sothorn's company in the season of 1899-1900, in a spirit unmistakably wrong. This would be a less important fact if the production were not so decorative. If it were not deemed necessary to be grossly sumptuous in the ornament provided for plays to-day, a miscalculation would not be so expensive an experiment. • Mr. Conried can put on *Die Versunkene Glocke* for a few nights any time, and follow it with anything else, and if it doesn't draw particularly well, nobody is bankrupt. The last production of this play at the Irving Place, a couple of weeks before Mr. Sothorn's appearance in New York, was bare in scenery, lights, music, and accessories generally, compared to the English version, and its infinite superiority was in no way diminished by that fact, but rather increased.\* It is very heartily to be wished that our stars might save money on these needless excrescences, and thus be able to rely on smaller houses and quicker changes of bill, and give attention more to the acting than to scene-painters and light-men.

Mr. Sothorn was very much better than any one else in the aggregation. Miss Harned was hopelessly miscast. The twin-star system is almost worse than the single-star system when it comes to casting a play. Mrs. Sothorn had a "right" to Rautendelein, of course. It was well played the last time in German, not by any of the

several women who had been doing poetical leads at the Irving Place, but by a light *comédienne*, who was put in simply because she could do it. Miss Harned represented the elf world not at all, but was fully as human as Magda, Heinrich's wife, and thus ruined one of the necessary contrasts of the play. Worse still, her elocution was as bad as that of any member of the company.

Take an instance of the way the star idea affected the force and meaning of the play. The third act is one simple and dramatic idea. The vicar comes up in the mountains and faces Heinrich with his duty to home, wife, and children. Heinrich answers. The opposite points of view make the dramatic action, and the tirades in which they are expressed should meet each other squarely and evenly, hit and counter, like a boxing match. Rautendelein is in the background, merely waiting for the outcome. Now what happened at the Knickerbocker? There was no square clash, no rapid and passionate interchange of arguments, so that the auditor should watch with suspense the blows on each side. No, Mr. Sothern and Miss Harned stood in the middle of the stage and hugged throughout the act, and the poor vicar floated humbly about the sides and said his lines in a way not to interfere with the sentimentality in the centre. It was a total destruction of the motive, merely because the Sotherns, to speak in

Broadway dialect, "are it." *Die Versunkene Glocke* is not a cheap love story. It is a beautiful struggle of two clear and constant forces, and unless you allow these two forces to carry on the fight, there is no drama. To carry out any such scheme, however, an all-round company and impartial stage management are absolutely necessary.

Even more important than this intellectual fairness is a purely physical quality, the ability to declaim. The only manager in New York who understands these things was about to rehearse a promising young English actress recently. "I will give you a part that I know you can't do," he said, "and then I shall be better able to see along what lines you need to work." If many of our English companies could be bound hand and foot, with their facial expressions paralyzed, and forced to carry by voice alone the meanings of the play to a man in the last row of the gallery, they would imbibe some idea of the holes in their training which they need to fill up. Mr. Sothern recited some passages pretty well, and his delivery throughout was at least respectable; but he, too, relied altogether too much at times on the wrong kind of action, especially in the fourth act. Hustling about the stage has very little to do with acting where long poetic speeches and the sustained clash of opposing meanings are concerned. There the voice is the great organ.

The actor must simply stand up and let it all out of his mouth. The speeches must be delivered as wholes, or tirades. The voice must be so flexible, as well as rapid and distinct, that the difference between loudness and inaudibility will no longer be the favorite method of shading, and pauses no longer the mark of "naturalness"—fatal word where anything of this nature is concerned. Variety of gesture is important but subordinate.

The translation by C. H. Meltzer is, on the whole, good. It misses Hauptmann sometimes, but usually gives the meaning, and much of the time suggests the poetry. Hauptmann is an artist of large range. I remember that before I knew him thoroughly my brother aroused my interest by a judgment which I now think tells the truth exactly.

"*Fuhrmann Henschel*," he said, "is called a realistic play. So is *Die Weber*, but *Die Versunkene Glocke* and *Hannele* are entirely romantic, or entirely composed of dream and fancy. Yet in all these plays of Hauptmann there is a point of meeting, whether they be realistic or romantic. *Die Weber* is a picture of ordinary suffering humanity, but the emotion in which the commonplace is wrapped can be referred to nothing actual, but to the frenzy of the poet who dreams the impossible dream of human brotherhood. *Fuhrmann Henschel* is painstaking real-

ism, but toward the end the soul of the teamster, purified by suffering, sees the unseen, the mysterious reality of the broken vows of love, and about the close is a more than realistic understanding of the mystery of death. In *Hannele* and *Die Versunkene Glocke* the poet allows himself freer rein, but Hauptmann is fundamentally a poet, and the emotion of the unseen goes through all of his work. That only means that Hauptmann sees life so much as it really is that he adds to the realism of life another element which life really possesses — its mysticism."

*Fuhrmann Henschel* was given in America at the Irving Place Theatre with Adolph von Sonnenthal as a visiting star in a manner to show why the drama and Sonnenthal's creation in the title rôle have inspired such enthusiastic praise in Germany. The Silesian dialect in which the play is written loses many of its difficulties when spoken, and the performance, as given here, was almost as easy to follow as if it were in pure German. Moreover, the action is so direct, the author's instinct so dramatic, the depicted passions so simple, and the playing was so sure and clear from the top of the cast to the bottom, that many Americans found the tragedy appealing to them with a keen reality little dimmed by its foreign origin.

There is no subtlety, heaven be praised, no

intricacy of motive, no balance and blending of evil and good. The right meets the wrong, people act from fundamental instinct and passion, and human faults bring innocent death. The picture of existence which passes before us is large. It implies more than it is. There is no insistence on the details of peasant life, no monkey curiosity about little differences, none of the fad aspects of realism. It is a teamster and his wife who act out the tragedy, but it is above that a noble man and an evil woman. With all the reserve due to the uncertainty of judging a foreign work of art, I believe it to be a tragedy of high and lasting merit.

Its originality is as striking as its force. It is original in its return to certain old methods of construction in the midst of obvious modernness. When one heard that the decided action all took place behind the scenes, he might well suppose the play would be undramatic; but the true explanation is that the real action lies in the march and clash of the contrasted passions, and the most definite deeds that grow out of them are as naturally assumed as they were in Greek tragedy. The first act shows us a family living in a cellar under a hotel. On a cot the wife lies dying. Next her is a sick baby. The teamster husband roughly comforts her, trying to quiet the pain by pushing her head brusquely with his large hand.



Though uneducated he has some money, and his servant Hanne, who flirts with other servants on the stage to show her nature, would think him a good match. His wife accuses her husband of infidelity, and he with easy, honest kindness waves aside her charges and her fear of death, and indifferently gives a promise she exacts, not to marry Hanne — a promise on which the first curtain falls.


In the second act his room is more disorderly. There is no wife on the cot. There is no baby in the crib. Only a casual reference has called attention to the infant in the first act, and only a passing word marks its absence now. Hanne, whose openness to various men is again marked, is accused by one of them of aiming at a marriage with Henschel, although she has promised herself to him. Hanne is domineering, active, selfish, and she keeps her own counsel and steadily pursues her own end. The hotel-keeper from above and other friends urge Henschel to marry, that he and his house may be better taken care of and less dismal. That Hanne has an illegitimate child he already knows. His promise to his wife troubles him. As this curtain is about to fall he tells the woman that he will soon have something to say to her, and sullen triumph gleams in her face.

In the third act Frau Henschel is busied about the room, one of her lovers puts his arms about

her, and there is a succession of scenes to show her triviality and shallow callousness. Henschel brings home the child. Instead of joy he meets an outbreak of harsh reproach from the mother, who denies that the girl is hers, and cuffs and drags the little thing about the room. When this act has run its course, despair and the shadow of the end are darkening the drama.

In the fourth the emotions of the teamster are goaded into anguish. He has been noble, long-suffering, as little as possible suspicious. In a tavern scene little jars between the drinking guests lead to the story of his wife's infidelity. The first man who insults her he takes in his calm and powerful hand and ejects from the tavern. Certain comments by the brother of his first wife lead Henschel to seize him by the wrist and hold him like a vice until the whole story of what gossip says is out, not only her infidelity, but the rumor that his first wife and baby were poisoned by her. Wild with pain and doubt, crying for certainty like a peasant Othello, he sends for Hanne. When she is charged with infidelity, she rushes at him with impetuous denial and reproach. When he accuses her of murder, she turns without a word and hurries from the room.

The catastrophe in the last act is simple and awful, not harrowing or accidental. We are prepared. The chords have been struck too hard, and



they must break. There has been suffering enough, and we are not disturbed by any hope of mending where lives are so completely shattered. Henschel, distracted, wanders in a daze. He can hardly tell fancy from things. Vaguely he feels that all is over. His friends try to make a reconciliation, and he goes through the empty form. Soon after he tells his wife that one of them must go. She replies in fear and rage that it will be she. But he is kind, and there is plenty of time, and he tells her not to hurry off, and goes into the room where all three sleep. Something in the possible meaning of his words and manner frighten Hanne. The hotel-keeper entering finds her in a panic. She sends him to the bedroom door. He comes back horror-stricken. Hanne looks. With a wild cry she seizes the child and breaks shrieking from the house.

It is done, and it is painted in the mind with the clearness and inevitability of great art. For once I was glad not to have read the play, for this fact made its stage qualities all the more certain. The acting could hardly be imagined better. Son-nenthal is a creative actor with very high talents and unerring judgment. He makes great portraits without a family trait in common. When I heard Sonnenthal talk off the stage, I caught sounds or looks of the gentle and highly cultivated Nathan, but could hardly conceive that this was the man

who with thick voice and rough exterior revealed the great untutored soul within the teamster. For three acts this soul was shown in its serenity of trouble and sweetness, then in its paroxysms of grief, and finally in the distraction mixed with settled purpose at the end. His art must be as high along certain big lines as any in the world.

The Irving Place Company played right up to the standard required by such acting as that of the star. Without greatness in any one part, they gave the impressive force of excellence throughout. There was not one of the many characters that did not add something to the extreme reality of the whole, and the way they played together was indeed an object lesson. The most difficult supporting rôle fell to Anna Braga. The hard coquetry, brutality to her child, power of making quick relations with all men, the impetuous, set, unideal nature of the woman's whole soul, were done with splendid truth and force.



## CHAPTER XII

GOETHE, SCHILLER, LESSING

OVER the curtain of the Irving Place Theatre stand the names Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, and of course the classic German tragedies are frequently seen there. Seldom, since my professional days began, has any drama moved me as strongly as did one performance, *Wilhelm Tell*, at this theatre. In spite of the fact that one or two scenes are inserted for their historical rather than their theatrical interest, the whole drama is so supremely alive, not only with poetry of the most uplifting sort, but with that sense of what is effective on the stage that seldom deserted Schiller, that, although a hardened and professional theatre-goer, I had to turn my attention away from the moving spectacle before me in order to avoid unseemly emotion. To Schiller, the great poet of light and vigor and beauty, the larger part of the credit was due, but it is much that there is in New York a company capable of rising to so splendid a task. All were good, and Eugen Schady as Tell was magnificent. He began with the utmost quiet, the simple con-

confidence of the mountaineer in his life among the mountains, the gentle affection of the husband and father in his home. When he was arrested for refusing to do homage to the tyrant he was still quiet, but in some indefinable way he suggested trouble ahead and the brewing of the storm. When Gessler tells him that his life is forfeited, but that it will be given back to him if, with his boasted skill, he shoots an apple with his crossbow at long range from the head of his beloved son, Tell's wonderment and outraged affection were given with large and deep emotion. He would far sooner die. Then Gessler says that the son shall die also. Tell falls upon the ground. He suffers agony, and it was all quiet and controlled, although it was full of expression and the outward show of wild grief. There was none of the mock acting in vogue now, consisting of lack of acting. Everything was done fully, though without rant. His hands trembled. He could not manage his bow. With one great struggle he lifted it. Long, long, he held it. Finally it was steady, and the arrow flew. Tell fell senseless. As his friends revived him and tried to explain that his life was saved, he listened in a daze, every moment breaking away to run his hands gently over the face and head of his boy. The rest of the company rose to Schiller's heights. Only the last scene, the shooting of Gessler, was a failure, because

stage mechanism is not lifted at the Irving Place to a point at which such a picture could be made impressive, as it might be in English companies, which, in the more essential parts of the performance, would fall indefinitely below the German.

I saw another Tell later, and felt the play keenly again, but Schady's performance stands out in my mind almost as movingly as it did two years ago.

A contrast between German and English methods is shown in *Maria Stuart*, which actresses, including Madame Janauschek, Madame Modjeska, and Fanny Davenport, have kept on the American stage. Modjeska's Mary is one of her most beautiful creations, the best Mary I have seen, but yet the play never moved me as it did at the Irving Place, because the whole cast there was so much better than Modjeska ever has. Schiller is a dramatist. In this play, only in one or two speeches, is the forward theatrical march slackened for a few moments. It is very high poetry, and yet it is the best stage-craft. That this is an unusual combination in historical plays, which often in Shakespeare, and sometimes in Schiller, rely more on association than on construction, is well known. There are few violent transitions or incidents in *Maria Stuart*. It goes on with the march of high passions, and sounds the depth more than the tumult of the soul. It is worked up largely through the passionate con-

trasts of Mary and Elizabeth, and, secondarily, of Leicester and Mortimer; and although in Modjeska's last performances in New York Elizabeth was frightfully weak and Mortimer commonplace, so superb was Modjeska as the Queen of Scots that in the third act, the pinnacle of the play, Schiller's immense power was thrown over the footlights despite the bad acting of the others, which one would have expected entirely to hide it. It is frequently said that *Mary Stuart* holds the stage because it offers such opportunities to star actresses. This is a most misleading half truth. Any great play with a prominent female rôle in it of course offers opportunities to a woman star, but Schiller's drama is not one which revolves around a single character. To see it played as it was last played at the Irving Place Theatre, with the title rôle in the hands of a person much less gifted than Madame Modjeska, is to understand how much stronger an impression can be made by an adequate expression of all the characters than by a lofty representation of one.

Another instance of what training and stage management can accomplish may be taken from the fall of 1900. The programme for a celebration of Schiller's birthday was prepared for two performances only, and yet there was one part of it, *Wallenstein's Lager*, in which a crowd was on the stage through the whole play, some three-



quarters of an hour, and it was so natural and varying through all that time that it alone would have been enough to hold the interest. People came and went, sat down and got up, paid attention and lapsed into themselves. Every minute the assemblage changed its form and composition and never showed any emphasis. Observers who know how hard English managers have to work to make a good crowd for fifteen minutes, in a play that is to run a year, would, if they could see the immense superiority of this crowd, prepared for so short a time, understand some of the advantages of such training as actors get in the best German theatres, and of such a director as Mr. Conried.

Who but Schiller could make so interesting a play as the *Lager* out of the mere talk by soldiers to show their various points of view? The German poet is always alive, palpitating, with a big sense of the physical world and its movement, as well as an intense moral ardor. Strangely enough, the only time a Schiller play ever tired me was in the hands of Sonnenthal. That great actor, when here, seemed to be at his best when dignity, sweetness, goodness, and restrained emotion were called for, and these qualities were not the essentials of Schiller's warrior. In making Wallenstein a sympathetic character, mild and judicial, the actor substituted something which was not

fitted to keep the play dramatic. The beauty of Schiller's language is largely composed of sweetness, but many of his plays and most of his strongest scenes depend for their theatrical effect on fire. Fire was wholly lacking in Sonnenthal. In such lines as those touchingly beautiful ones, in which Wallenstein tells Max that all the others who surrounded him were really strangers and he alone a child of the house, the actor's delivery was exquisite; but it is only now and then that the strong-willed warrior touches such tender strings, and when he has to drive his sister from the room with the final words, "It is my will," or forbid Max to approach his daughter, or declare that he is a prisoner, or go to try the effect of his presence on the unruly soldiery, there was a lack of power. Sonnenthal's art seemed to fail at about the place where Salvini's began. People in this country will perhaps more definitely see what is meant by remembering two Othellos, Edwin Booth being great in the first and Salvini in the last half of the play. If Sonnenthal were to undertake the Moor, he would probably give the poetry and sympathy of the opening scenes, but not the boiling restraint of the third act and the fierce fury of the falling action. Plastically, however, he was wonderful. The picturesque distinctness of his Nathan in appearance was almost equalled by the look of his Wallen-

stein, which persists in my memory even though it carries with it no realization of Schiller's Duke.

The company was singularly below its usual level. *Wallenstein* is in some respects a great drama, but it cannot live through a mediocre performance. When Ludwig Barnay was playing the title rôle in Chicago some ten years ago, he remarked in conversation that he did not see why two hundred people had been willing to stand through such a talky play. Of course, the reason is not far to seek. The poetic drama, in which the dramatic element is the clash of soul with soul, expressed largely in beautiful but extended speeches and soliloquies, is the highest drama there is, but its power of holding the heart and pleasing the mind can easily be removed by inadequate delivery.

Goethe, less a dramatist than Schiller, holds his place partly through the German love of literature.

Carl Ernst Schubert once wrote, "In Shakespeare I seem to find a strong, unconscious man, who is able with perfect certainty, and without reasoning, reflecting, subtilizing, and classifying, to seize with never failing hand the true and false in man, and express it with so much nature; whilst in Goethe, though I recognize the same ultimate aim, I am always fighting with obstacles,

and must be always taking heed, lest I accept for plain truth what is only an exhibition of plain error."

Goethe's comment on this criticism was, "Here our friend hits the nail on the head."

Even in the best performance of Goethe I ever saw I was just a trifle bored nervously, in spite of the constant intellectual interest. It was *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, played at the Irving Place Theatre. By far the best feature of the performance was Martha Schiffel's acting in the title rôle. The Orestes, a visiting actor, Carl Wagner, was not in the same class with at least four women in the regular company. His most satisfactory point was his enunciation, and the combination of speed with distinctness, which he accomplished in rhetorical rôles, was a virtue of which my appreciation is naturally keen, since it is so rare with us. But he was not able to fill out in any way the rôle of Orestes. That is a part, not only of high poetry, like all the play, but of large and evident acting possibilities. His madness is not commonplace insanity any more than Lear's is. It is gloriously significant, full of huge symbols, — high imagination, moral romance, so to speak, — loaded always with the tone of fate, hinting at the meaning of punishment in its most profound sense — at laws quite beyond right and wrong. Contrast this, the atmosphere in which Orestes moves in the second

and third acts, with the pure joy and spiritual relief of the fifth, and it is easy to see what a tremendous moral dramatic impression the picture ought to make. Herr Wagner seemed to have neither the original intellect nor the technical resources to raise the character to the heights of spiritual tragedy. He stood upon the earth intellectually, and was monotonous technically — taken, as he must be taken, in view of the possibilities of the play.

Not so Martha Schiffel. She came right up to Goethe's meaning with a noble competence. She is a truly classic actress. No reliance on the woman's charm here, no coquetry, no little things of any kind, no tricks, human or theatrical; and yet variety, sure, accurate, moderate contrast and transition, a technique that seemed informed by and at the service of the most loyal feeling for that remote, purified, deeply thought-out world of which Goethe's *Iphigenie* is part. There is no play in which the German seer is more essential, more refined, more concentrated, and there is in all his works no woman who stands further above the petty interests of life and belongs more fully to idealized truth. Goethe, with his manifold interests, plunged with all his power into the heart of the classic, as he did into the heart of the romantic. A number of actresses have more striking talents than Miss Schiffel, but none whom

I have seen could hold more faithfully to a classic picture. In carrying out her true conception, her face, voice, and attitudes all were so varied, just, and harmonious, that she stood upon the stage for the five acts (in every one of which she was on most of the time) without ever giving the sense of repetition, and possibly had the others been as good, I might have felt the unslackened flow of happiness that Schiller sometimes gives me.

Lessing holds third place in the permanent Irving Place repertoire. The first performance I ever saw of him was when Sonnenthal made his first American appearance in fifteen years in *Nathan der Weise*. It was a genuine triumph. The audience was made up of men and women who loved elevation and fineness in plays and acting, and they gave the veteran actor as enthusiastic a welcome as any Broadway audience could bestow upon a farce or a French realistic melodrama.

What a "frost" *Nathan der Weise* would have encountered had it been witnessed by an average aggregation of first-night Americans! The Klondike air which greeted the opening night of *Catherine*, before the professional theatre-goers got out of the way for a healthier public, would be hot in comparison, and yet in this literary

and untheatrical play Sonnenthal received an ovation comparable to the lurid first night of *Zaza*. Thereby hang tales in plenty.

What had happened when, at the end of the scene between Nathan and Saladin in the third act, the cultivated audience recalled the actor again and again, with the heartiest and most spontaneous enthusiasm? Why, he had delivered a parable in a number of long speeches. He had stood there, and in the quietest and gentlest tones explained to the Sultan some profound truths about religion. In monologues, pages in length, he had laid out a beautiful truth, written in classic German, recited with abundant grace, clearness, and seriousness, but without one stage trick; and the audience loved it, leaned forward to grasp every word and every shade of delivery, and went home feeling that one evening more had been properly spent.

Even before this intellectual and artistic climax was reached, in the serene, almost motionless dialogue of the first act, when the most salient touch is hardly more exciting than an explanation, with Lessing's pith and point, that it is easier to dream of angels than to live righteously, everybody was pleased. They were not getting dramatic action, far from it, for *Nathan der Weise* is no play. They were hearing good literature, good style, and they were seeing a wise old Jew,

of deep and placid mind, saintly spirit, and reverend, picturesque appearance, portrayed by an actor who was giving them no outbursts, no quick changes, only beauty, dignity, and harmonious creation. That happened to be enough. There were many Jews present to see this vindication of their character. Sonnenthal himself is a Jew, and it is largely that race that keeps the play so constantly alive in Germany and Austria; but not entirely. Sympathy with the moral of the drama had less to do with its success here than a love of literature and histrionic delicacy that atoned for the lack of every element that by all rules should compose a successful play. *Nathan der Weise* has little plot, and what it has is connected only by a remote intellectual fancy with the principles and feelings so constantly discussed. It is a theorem drama if ever there was one. And yet it is one of the unfailing resources of the German stage. It happens to be written with the vitality of one of the greatest minds of modern times, and therefore, in spite of everything, wears the stamp of immortality. Sonnenthal is a man of fine natural and trained emotion, absolutely unerring taste and noble distinction, who never for an instant, although playing a rôle where it could so easily be done, strayed from the direct path of beauty. He made Nathan a Jew, and he gave him many race peculiarities,



but they were always subordinated in the perfectly harmonized and proportioned picture of a large, charitable nature. It would be rare to get from the most careful reading of the play so vividly the picture of a deep mind and heart directed and confirmed by experience into the most spiritual magnanimity. It was high interpretative acting, the kind that counts more weeks later than on the very night.

The place where tragedy flourishes most in New York in amount and, next to the Irving Place, in quality, is in the Jewish theatres of the Bowery. Our Italians like it too, but their actors are inferior. Among the Jews, who, of course, have many plays dealing with their own life, Shakespeare, Schiller, and Ibsen are favorites. They are usually adapted, as indicated in the titles, *The Yiddish Nora*, *The Yiddish King Lear*, *The Yiddish Queen Lear*, *The Yiddish Hamlet*, although *Othello* is played without being put into a Jewish environment. *Fuhrmann Henschel* is made over under the name of *The Oath*. My trips to the Ghetto give me more to think about and less reason to regret time ill spent than most of my theatre evenings on Broadway. The acting averages high, and Jacob Adler is one of the most complete and finished actors I have seen. Asked once why he didn't play a certain part, he

replied, "It is a fine rôle, and I should enjoy it, except that I once played a part much like it." Such a statement from an American actor would be a surprise, as our players have "lines." Mr. Adler plays everything,—general tragedy, like *Lear*, character parts, like the old musician in their version of Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*, an idiot in *The Wild Man*, high comedy, melodrama, and farce, and he is good in everything. Aristotle complained that critics expected the dramatist to excel in all branches of his art. Mr. Adler is about the only actor in America, whom I can think of, who has no "line."

To the Jewish acceptance of tragedy there are limits. In *Rosie*, as the Yiddish version of *Kabale und Liebe* is called, the end shows a compromise in the problem of the unhappy ending. It follows Schiller rather closely. When it was first put on, some ten years ago, it ended tragically; the audience objected and after a little the poisoned lovers were allowed to recover, as they do in some versions of *Romeo and Juliet*. The latest device, however, is to have the play proper, in four acts, end in tragedy, and then add a fifth act, for those who wish it, in pure farce, where the lovers are married and join in the general festivities. This has an obvious resemblance to the Greek method of following the tragedy with a farce; for even the Greeks were human.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ROSTAND

*CYRANO DE BERGERAC* when first given in English was a great popular success, and artistically there was a confusing mixture of triumph and catastrophe. M. Edmond Rostand emerged in glory, and so did the stage manager, who was presumably Mr. Richard Mansfield; but the translator and the actors ran up against something which left them where the great comic hero was left by the windmill in the thirteenth chapter of *Don Quixote*.

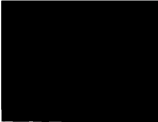
No other dramatic event of that season was anticipated with such a keen and sustained attention as Mr. Mansfield's *Cyrano*. Various kinds of men and women, interested in the stage, in acting, in the literary drama, — making a total audience rather uncommonly intellectual, — looked forward to the experiment for months. *Cyrano de Bergerac* had driven the ablest literary men of Paris into paroxysms of applause, and it had secured an equal success among the theatre-going multitude. It was the sensation of the decade. Brilliant critics likened young Rostand to Corneille, to Shakespeare, and, more rationally, to

Hugo and Dumas. Some called the drama a novelty, but the weightier judges found in it a rival to the masterpieces of the past.

As a foreigner, I speak with insecurity; but when this play was given in an almost literal translation at the Garden Theatre, it was to me on the stage what it had been in the reading,—an extremely clever proof of skill, a brilliant show of execution, a series of scenes exactly calculated to exhibit the powers of strong and versatile actors,—all this, but without simplicity, inevitableness, deep sincerity, without, in short, any true greatness. The very theme, shrewdly chosen and inviting as it is, is not the subject for a great drama, unless it were possibly a low comedy. It lacks the majesty of tragedy and the aloofness from the sentimental sympathies of big comedy. Yet it has much comedy, and in spots approaches tragedy, so that it is less the pure romantic melodrama than are Dumas and Hugo. It is a fact denied by many, forgot by more, that no deeply constituted work of dramatic art is produced by an equal mixture of several species,—so much tragedy, so much melodrama, so much comedy, and so much farce. The history of the stage in England, Spain, and Germany shows that comic scenes may exist in the highest tragedy, but that is an entirely different story. Relief is one thing, lack of a distinct nature is another.

If we had several theatres, each devoted to one branch of the drama, we should then more readily see the beauty and the laws of art, and the more rigidly believe that the beauty of art is inseparable from its laws. *Cyrano de Bergerac* is a brilliant exhibition of all that M. Rostand had on hand. It is not a living body born of a single conception.

Mr. Mansfield's version was decent prose in some parts and most disturbing doggerel in others. It retained all the scenes, and was as faithful to the French as a commonplace translation can be to a dashing original. The French loved *Cyrano* as much for its sparkling and buoyant verse as for its story and its pictures, and those who saw it in English judged little more than half of its qualities. Even so, it was an intellectual treat, for, in the Gallic idiom, "it is something." It was the expression of an unusual talent in a man still young, and it was full of wit, of fancy, of knowledge of the stage, of variety. The New York production dealt successfully with the scenic aspect, which is important in such a showy piece, and the general level of the acting was respectable. Miss Anglin, a young woman theretofore unknown, acted Roxane well enough to assure to her good rôles upon our stage, and took such reasonable advantage of her opportunities that in comparatively few months she was recognized as one of the best actresses in America.



Of course, interest centred in the leading actor. Cyrano is as much *Cyrano de Bergerac* as Hamlet is *Hamlet*—far more, in fact, for in the one case the play is the main thing, even if one character is so much of it, while in the French work many scenes are forced in, against the harmony of the whole, to show off the hero. Mr. Mansfield, in my opinion, though not in that of the public, failed. So able an actor could hardly lag further behind the possibilities. He did not even try to speak loud and terribly, to have a swashing and a martial outside, to swagger nobly, because Mr. Mansfield thinks that heroics are naïve and foolish. He would probably play Rodrigue as he plays the heroes of George Bernard Shaw, and he acted Cyrano as if he were Beau Brummel. But, you see, Cyrano wasn't Beau Brummel, and that really makes a difference.

Many effects in the play depend on the flamboyant nature of the hero,—the mixture of ferocity, poetry, bitterness, and folly; and when even a clever actor undertakes to convert the central pillar of the piece into a quiet, contemplative wit, the whole collapses. You might as well play the Moor of Venice as a dispassionate psychologist, or Falstaff as a person whose humor was thin and rational. A few passages Mr. Mansfield did well, because they fitted into this subdued mood, but the flaring whole he refused to attempt.

The cadets of Gascony are the Rough Riders of those days, and Cyrano is their glorified colonel. Look for a moment at the last lines in the play: —

Ah ! te voilà, toi, la Sottise !

— Je sais bien qu'à la fin vous me mettrez à bas ;  
N'importe : je me bats ! je me bats ! je me bats !

[*Il fait des moulinets et s'arrête heletant.*

Oui, vous m'arrachez tout, le laurier et la rose !  
Arrachez ! Il y a malgré vous quelque chose  
Que j'emporte, et ce soir, quand j'entrerai chez Dieu,  
Mon salut balaiera largement le seuil bleu,  
Quelque chose que sans un pli, sans une tache,  
J'emporte malgré vous,

[*Il s'élance l'épée haute.*

et c'est . . .

[*L'épée s'échappe de ses mains, il chancelle, tombe dans les bras de Le Bret et de Ragueneau.*

Roxane [*Se penchant sur lui et lui baisant le front*] :

C'est ? . . .

Cyrano [*Rouvre les yeux, la reconnaît et dit en souriant*] :  
Mon panache.

One thing reckless foolishness and all his other enemies cannot take from him, his *panache*, his waving soldier's plume. But is that all that *panache* means? Far from it. If a party of Frenchmen are dining, and the wine circulates pleasantly, and one of the guests receives from it a touch of inspiration, and talks with delicacy, dash, and beauty, not quite reasonably, but entrancingly, his admiring comrades say, *Il a son panache*. Well, Mr. Mansfield gave us a drama

which everybody wished to see, with a set of competent actors, but he played *Cyrano* without his *panache*.

One special point, raised while Mr. Mansfield was in New York, interested me. I received the following letter:—

“DRAMATIC EDITOR OF *The Commercial Advertiser*:

“*Sir*: You have found fault frequently with the impossible situations devised for the stage by our modern dramatic writers, and I agreed with you always. Ridiculous situations offend; they do not contribute to the enjoyment of farces, and melodramas often lose their effect by affronting one's common sense. But the worst offenders are the comic opera librettists. Yet here we have Rostand doing what the weakest of stage carpenters do; the situations are comic, operatic, and you do not mind it at all. That you are silent does not trouble me, but why don't I object? Why do I rather like to have Rostand smash through all my prejudices against absurd situations?

“When *Cyrano* stands under the balcony dictating love speeches for Roxane to Christian; when, impatient of Christian's delivery, he advances and speaks his love directly to the girl above, without being discovered; when *Cyrano* meets and defeats one hundred men; when Roxane comes safely through the Spanish lines up to the French army and brings a wagon-load of delicious victuals; when at the right moment the cadets find *Cyrano* at the pastry-cook's, then, my dear sir,



you, the critic, are silent, and I, the spectator, am pleased.

"It isn't that there are compensations of language, beauty, fancy, character. The offence in itself, the deliberate or reckless disregard of what would seem to be a perfectly reasonable limitation upon the dramatist, is part of the delight the play has for me. It is part of the poetry of the whole. It is Cyranic, but that it will go down with other characters not so licensed as Bergerac's, Shakespeare shows.

"I could be compelled, now, to admit logically the inference that your approved requirement that stage situations should be not improbable were unsound; that you have been setting up for small men standards which larger dramatists can safely ignore. Yet I won't stand it from the small men. You may be unfair; you, the critic, with your more or less inflexible criteria; but I can't be, for my test is only pleasure, and my judgments are forced upon me.

"A SPECTATOR."

My answer was:—

"There is no harder question in dramatic construction than that of probability. Every drama has its conventions, even Ibsen. Some modern writers believe that progress lies in reducing conventions to the fewest possible. We, however, do not believe that great art can be produced without great assumptions. The opposite doctrine is called realism or naturalism. With that doctrine Rostand is evidently not afflicted. He makes all the assumptions he needs. The only question is, does he make the right ones? Do they fuse into a whole which makes the spectator feel its reality, provided he

has not limited himself to the reality he sees in his daily life?

1, "Enough contradictory opinions by intelligent persons have been given to make any one of judicial temper refrain from too positive a conclusion. One, perhaps the most famous, American playwright said in private conversation that the drama seemed to him so absurd when he saw it abroad that only Coquelin's great art made it tolerably plausible. He spoke especially of the balcony scene. To another, the one hundred men were the greatest *crux*. Others, equally intelligent, swallow the whole story without a struggle. In this state of affairs we can give our correspondent only an opinion avowedly personal and hesitating. It is as follows:—

"*Macbeth*, with all its witches, is not improbable, though of course it is impossible. The ghost in *Hamlet* is as plausible, as real, as alive as the Prince himself. This is the general rule in great art. It creates a world, a truth, a reality of its own. On the other hand, the horn episode in *Hernani* is grotesque. It doesn't 'go down.' It is not an imaginative conception. The ghosts of Voltaire have long ago been recognized as absurd, just as Shakespeare's have been recognized as real. Rostand seems to us to belong in a sense to the family of Hugo more than to that of the real creators—Corneille, for instance, and Molière. He doesn't lift us above the real world into one more simple and compelling. His impossibilities are also improbable. Cyrano's victory over one hundred men, Roxane's journey, the years of silence after Christian's death, all seem insufficiently prepared and, as it were, insufficiently excused. The silence is *explained*, just as the journey is, but that is another matter."


*Cyrano de Bergerac*, being uncopyrighted in America, was played by Ada Rehan and her supporters, and on the East Side by the Third Avenue Stock Company. To see the drama presented by these organizations was to appreciate some of the difficulties met and surmounted by Mr. Mansfield's stage management. Much of the strength of the play is in its quantity. Its wit is as plentiful as it is sharp; the personages engaged are a multitude; the scenes are varied, full, and lively; the speeches plentiful, extended, and individual; the moods numerous, although one is dominating. In both the performances which followed Mr. Mansfield in Greater New York, this fulness was removed and a thin selection substituted,—half as many actors, shorter and fewer speeches, sparser settings, a fraction of the repartees,—a total effect not of too exuberant workmanship, but of a poorly chosen line of samples. Imagine two silent supernumeraries doing service as that swarm of hungry poets, and you have a fair idea of the whole Daly show. Prudery called for the excision of some parts, economy killed others, and the necessity of keeping *Cyrano* down to the level of Mr. Daly's mediocre leading man turned the spouting poet-warrior into a comparatively terse foil for Miss Rehan. Mr. Richman, however, never looked more handsome than he did in his mildly enlarged

nose, and Miss Rehan seldom exulted with less restraint in her own personality.

The Third Avenue production was somewhat better than Mr. Daly's, though necessarily pitiful. It had more gusto, more sincerity, but was naturally wholly ignorant and inadequate.

The performance at the Irving Place, however, had interesting features. It was a splendid poem. The aspect of beauty and sentiment was brought out, the witty and Gascon element remaining in the background. The result was naturally not wholly Gallic, but it was attractive, moving, and technically admirable. With only three weeks to run before the Sonnenthal engagement, Mr. Conried, knowing that if every performance were crowded the production would still be a poor investment financially, spent, as he told me, over five thousand dollars to put the play on for this little time simply because it was a drama that his patrons ought to see. To supplement this, with only ten days to prepare a production requiring over one hundred people and heavy scenery on an inadequate stage, the company showed what training is by coming out of the ordeal with flying colors. There could hardly be a better illustration of what the stage and stage management ought to be.

Fulda's translation is the work of a gifted lyric poet, and in those parts where the German lan-



guage is so much softer, richer, and more sincere than the French, namely, in all the sentimental and fancifully lyric passages, Fulda possibly equals or even surpasses his original. In the passages of corrosive wit or rippling and flashing play of humor and fancy, he cannot get the lightness and conciseness of the Frenchman. However, whatever Gallic elements were eliminated, a very beautiful and poetic play was left.

The acting corresponded to the translation. Eugen Schady's Cyrano was not light, but it was sad, forceful, and sympathetic. He had the presence and the temperament for the dominating parts, — emotional fulness and fineness, — a moving voice and soft eyes for the passages of suffering and love, but not the dash or the vinegar for the swash-buckling and cynical parts. Take the passage where Cyrano explains how, when he begins to forget and dream of love and happiness for himself, he is suddenly recalled by his profile on the wall. That brought a laugh for Mr. Mansfield and was pure sadness with Herr Schady. Likewise, the German got less than the American out of Cyrano's retort to the count who used bad epithets: "Ah, indeed? And I, Cyrano-Savinien-Hercule de Bergerac," and vastly more out of the other aspects of that first act. The duel scene was particularly effective. Another illustration of the different interpreta-

tions and abilities could be found in the famous "No, thank you," speech, which was full of bitter scorn in Mr. Mansfield and of earnest, elevated ideal in Herr Schady.

The original Cyrano was the last to be seen in this country. Coquelin, who, of course, set the tone for the whole, took the play as a fantasy, a sort of midsummer night's dream, which he read with exquisite taste and a mastery of voice sufficient to give the shades of sadness and humor by the merest touch; the warrior side he simply omitted. Cyrano, as written in the book, is D'Artagnan, poet and wit. Coquelin made him not at all D'Artagnan, moderately a wit, and through and through a poet. He was a poet of range, however, as delighted and delightful over the phantasmagoric scene with De Guiche, under Roxane's balcony, as in the solemn and defiant end. It was the literary side of the play to which the cultivated French actor gave the fullest value. He felt each line so lovingly that he seemed unwilling to use it as an excuse for histrionic high relief, preferring to read it perfectly and let it go at that. From this mild atmosphere he emerged somewhat in the last act, which he played with power as well as with nobility.

His conception of the character harmonized with his choice of method and his view of the

poem. His Cyrano was not now sad, now gay, reason following grotesque fantasy, everything Gascon and inconsequent, but rather finely tempered all the time by a fusion and balance of the elements of his nature, moderate when he jested, light when he was sad, treating his own sorrows and the world in general with the docility of a philosopher as well as the sensitiveness of a poet. This understanding of the man and the story naturally fitted some scenes better than others, but Coquelin doubtless calculated every part in view of the whole, and he left at the end a picture poignant, beautiful, and lasting, without the full vivacity and volume of the play, but with more beauty of feeling and charm of fantasy than one would be likely to get unassisted from the book.


The first act suffered somewhat from the lack of fire. Rostand has given an impression of warlike exaggeration to the opening scene. The crowd is in uproar, Cyrano's cane is "wildly flourished," his mustache is on end, his nose is "terrifying," he turns up his sleeves for fight; the crowd closing in, grumbling, in uproar, is driven back by his domineering manner. Coquelin did not attempt that effect, but had it all done in low relief, like a reading of the scene, done delicately by him, not particularly well by the other actors. It was the same with the duel in verse: no at-

tempt at dash or excitement, but rather a gentle illustration of the perfectly delivered lines. The exit to meet one hundred men had the same poetic unreality.

The scenes between Ragueneau and his cooks and poets were sketchy but artistically sincere. Coquelin's first test in that act came when Cyrano, listening to Roxane, half believing that she loves him, hears, in her description of her lover, the fatal word "handsome." It is a very difficult bit, and he played it with a marked start, followed almost immediately by self-control and almost self-forgetting. Of course he did the introduction of the cadets, as he would any tirade of the kind, perfectly, and his "No, thank you," speech, equally expert in delivery, had the added elements of sympathy and human dignity. His acting, when he told his story, in spite of the insults of Christian, was full of variety and elevation, and so convincing that his final "embrace me" touched the heart.

In the third act his pleading under the balcony, tender and wistful, always suggested what floods of passion might be loosed could he but speak openly for himself, and a moment later, telling De Guiche his fantastic story of the moon, he was identifying himself with the unchartered imaginings of the poet to such a degree that the harmony between the dramatist and his inter-






preter could not conceivably have been greater. In this scene the appeal of Coquelin to the cultivated reason was as strong as anywhere in the play. Desjardins, who as De Guiche was not called upon for much, helped this scene decidedly by the unobtrusive truth and clearness with which he showed the encircling fascination of Cyrano's tale. In the fourth act, Coquelin, skilful as he was, certainly did not reach the possibilities, since that is one of the places where Cyrano rises in his physical might to drive out opposing force. In the fifth he became a great actor in the grand style, and thus, ending with his most open and emotional work, fixed his poetic rendering of the play completely in the memory.

Bernhardt played Roxane with the conscientiousness of an artist, never for a second obtruding herself or putting her effects further forward than they belonged in the general picture. Not only is Roxane a small creature for Bernhardt's big powers, but she is also rather out of her line — rather slight, fragile, essentially insignificant, relying on the mere usual attributes of a girl. Naïveté, Bernhardt never gave her, and external girlishness she has not kept the power to present, if she ever had it, which may be doubted. The girl plays such a large, foolish, and dull part in poetry, and perhaps in life! However, if Bernhardt's robin occasionally suggested the wings of

an eagle, it was in some almost indefinable way, since she never stepped out of her rôle. She did everything well, without trying to do more. Her listening in the first act was a masterly lesson in how to help her audience look at the other actors; her grief over Christian's death showed her great emotional power; but throughout the play she acted much of the time without making many strong effects until the last act, and then her genius shot out. Fourteen years had passed then, and she was a woman, the midsummer of her life untimely hued like autumn. Coquelin's success in giving this scene sadness that satisfied and beauty that moved, was partly due to a few great strokes of tenderness and regret so quietly drawn by Bernhardt. Her last monosyllable, *c'est*, was worth a world of ordinary acting, so strongly and completely did the voice carry the emotion of the scene. Bernhardt's power is not in realistic sincerity. She makes love not as if she actually loved the man in front of her, but as if she looked through him and beyond, to a vision in her mind, to the beauty of love itself. She is at her best an actress not of reality and the heart direct, but of imagination and its general light, so what she does best are some of those things in which the mind of man takes its least-encumbered flights.

*L'Aiglon* is much higher in tone than *Cyrano*; less brilliant, but simpler, more coherent, more elevated. It was given first in America, in the fall of 1900, in an English translation by Louis N. Parker, which was firm, easy, and sometimes beautiful. The greatness of the drama triumphantly showed itself against wholly erroneous playing by most of the principal actors. From Miss Maude Adams, in the title rôle, down, they perversely or timidly threw away the opportunities given them by the brilliant stage-craft of the author, obscured his sentiment, and mumbled his words in their teeth. As for verse, it was at every instant of the play turned in the rendering to baldest prose. Never was the nature of an imaginative tragedy more completely ignored, and this time, at least, the result was so unmistakable that the effect may in the end be good, by forcing those responsible for this performance to imitate, in future attempts to handle the higher drama, some of the intelligence recently shown by several American stars. In general supervision there was — not to speak of such experts as Mr. Mansfield and Mrs. Fiske — nothing approaching the understanding shown in the management of *Romeo and Juliet*. As for the principal part, although Miss Adams wins so many hearts, mine among the rest, by her refinement and gentleness and her constant work while



on the stage, no actor can safely take a great part and utterly pervert its meaning. Change the sullen sadness of the eaglet to the cooing of a slightly perturbed dove, and Rostand's play loses its soul. Take away the mighty dreams of Napoleon's enfeebled son; his violent imagination, beating with faltering wing against his cage; his bitter mocks and sudden gusts of passion — and you take away the character which makes the play. This nature of the eaglet, the impeded flicker of his ominous father, has been expressed by Rostand's genius in words that bite one moment and soar the next, and in images that are large, dramatic, and oratorical, and these outbursts of eloquence or stabs of irony were dropped in the manner of one saying, "Give me a peanut, please." For mockery there was sweetness, for poetry there was prose, and for romantic patriotism and fitful dreams there was a little gentle pathos.

Rostand, in *L'Aiglon*, opens in the favorite modern way also used in *Cyrano*. A crowd, mostly ladies, chatter until the theme of the drama gradually unfolds itself from their broken phrases. Probably no human being could understand much of what they said. Not only was the individual elocution miserable, but the stage management showed its failure at the outset. Each half line in the play makes some point, and these separate and significant details, instead of


standing out, visible and detached, were all run together, like molasses, without form or meaning, few of the actors succeeding in getting their words past their teeth.

The Duke of Reichstadt in the second act speaks of "morbid enjoyment of our own sufferings," and "contempt for those who live content," as characteristic of himself and his times; and this is one of a hundred lines that work against an interpretation all goodness and smiles. The superb stage-craft of the last half of this act, in which, to the alarm of all, the Duke shows that he has frustrated the attempt to keep secret his father's history, and is on fire with Wagram and Marengo, are effective through the playwright's power alone.

Her first task in the second act — a speech in which the Duke ironically declares that he is not a prisoner, "but" — was much better executed by Miss Adams. Then the little eagle goes on to a passionate explanation that he is being killed by his soul, by —

"That mighty name, which throbs with guns and bells,  
Clashes and thunders, ceaselessly reproaches  
Against my languor with its bells and guns!"

That is followed by a scene in which he wearily opens the love letters of women — indeed, the whole play, from the acting standpoint, is one




demand after another for the whole range of histrionic power, as, from the literary side, it is one of those gloriously high and simple stories which show the inevitable crushing of a human soul upon the wheel of fate. Now comes the little box of soldiers, with which the poor child burlesques his father's awful skill—a scene strange and terrible, which should have no place for the pretty and piquant. In the quick succession of situations, the next is the Duke's victory over one who betrayed Napoleon, won by sparks lingering from that emperor's volcanic strength. Then comes the first big scene for the old Flambeau, the Coquelin part, in English sunk to nothingness by the actor. After that the Duke pleads with his grandfather for the throne of France, wins him, and is then beaten by the chancellor, Metternich, who, by astute suggestion, draws the Austrian emperor away from the Eaglet, and then proceeds, after a great theatrical episode with Flambeau, to crush the youth by forcing him to study his paltry visage in the mirror. Goaded to the hysterical courage of despair the Eaglet hurls the lamp into the glass and calls on his father's name for help. This scene would be moving if it were acted by Italian puppets, and it counted, though it was too dramatic for Miss Adams, and Edwin Arden did almost nothing.

The climax of the play is the fifth act, as played

in French, the fourth, as played in English, where, upon the field of Wagram, the incompetent little would-be hero ruins the conspiracy by his vacillation, and then grows so hysterical that the moaning wind turns to the cries of soldiers buried in the field; then to the tumult of battle, "the wild laughter of the fierce Hussars," and the little soldier in the tumult he commands. The physical machinery of this ghostly scene was the only feat of stage management in the production, and it was excellent. Miss Adams did her best work here, and, by necessity throwing away her irrelevant graces, did a piece of straight acting that was not without power. The dramatic effect of this act was strong, but it was a characteristic sign of taste to change Rostand's half-satirical ending to a melodramatic one. Instead of the Eaglet's falling impotently into line with his soldiers, he points proudly to Flambeau and says, in a commanding voice, "Honor the dead!"

The last act is the death, and carries itself. It lacked that bitterness and irony and those contrasts between the Napoleonic flicker and the Austrian weakness, which should pull the whole play together, but it had at least pathos.

Then came Sarah Bernhardt, who played the title rôle in *L'Aiglon* at the Garden Theatre in a way to make me believe that genius is immortal.



Never before, in many years' experience of this actress, have I seen her more grand in extent and towering in height. It is something, after all, to be truly great. Furors come and go. The world hails some happy favorite as a second Bernhardt, or greater than Bernhardt, or something else in which the very terms of the comparison are a tribute to the woman whose talents lend our poverty-stricken vocabularies their signs of comparison. Meantime, without law or limit, the superb original of all the talk, whether praise or blame, goes on. She moves so high that we might roll twenty of our "great" actors into one, and feel ashamed at our inability to suggest Bernhardt. When, at rare intervals, a very great master in any art moves across our sky, the whole machinery of ordinary judgment is thrown out of gear. *Hamlet* has more faults than "Mary had a little lamb" and more virtues; but how express one's feelings for *Hamlet*? I imagine that Sarah Bernhardt, in the permanent history of the stage, will rank above every other woman save Rachel. And how invigorating it is to find this artist, after holding the world's homage for a third of a century, doing her work with the buoyancy of spring and the mellowness of autumn! From Sardou's noise she turns to Rostand's music, calls upon her whole orchestra of talents, and from the first rise of the curtain to its final fall brings into play the thou-



sand contributions, big and little, that have been stored up in her by natural gifts, ripened by long training in the best of theatres and outside of it.

When Bernhardt stepped upon the stage in the first act, looking the young Duke so well that the admiration of Paris for this external aspect of her skill was explained, she struck at once the opening note of amiable mediocrity. Her own temperament, abundant and conquering, did not get between the spectator and that other temperament, gentle, excitable, and weak. The irony of the young man is set in weariness and lack of heart. Bernhardt, in these quiet, opening strokes, made every effect perfectly clear, and yet all covered with a gray uniformity. Even when emotion starts, in the interview with the tailor, it starts with distrust and scepticism. Then comes the lesson in history, and for the first time the Eaglet's dreams break out. Bernhardt played this scene with happy mockery, relishing each thrust, and throwing back her head now and then with bursts of gay and bitter laughter. After this absolutely perfect leading up comes the Duke's wild account of Napoleon's deeds in 1805. Here Bernhardt dropped a little, for she partly substituted gymnastics for genius. She went through one of her old lightning tirades, which no one else can equal, but which are wonderful only as a high jump is wonderful. These exhibitions of mere virtuosity

were rare in *L'Aiglon*, mere temporary intrusions, instead of being the main thing, as they often were in her Sardou days. In a moment it is over, and in the passages with her mother and Fanny it is again great art, exploiting not itself, but its material.

In the second act Bernhardt did the famous "but" speech with rippling sarcasm, her irony not strenuous, but almost enjoying the absurdity she ridicules. A moment later and the Eaglet is telling Prokesch how Napoleon's mighty name, clashing and thundering in a languid soul, ceaselessly reproaches and poisons his timorous son—lines among the grandest in the play, and given by Bernhardt with glowing and tempered fire, where beauty counts as much as heat. Then come the toys, the wooden box, the poor tin soldiers of Napoleon's son. Here is a task for the greatest actor. How easily it can seem "cute" we saw in the English performance, and in Bernhardt's hands what a mixture of awe and charm,—the fascination of burlesque and the excitement of reality,—the ascending enthusiasm of the Eaglet, dropping so suddenly when crossed by the shade of Metternich. "Where are the Austrians?" sneers the prime minister. "They've run away," says the Eaglet, and Bernhardt said it without a touch of exclamation, yet with a something that makes a blow. It was

in effects of masterly quiet that the actress did much of her finest work. As Flambeau tears through his biography and eulogy, pages long, Bernhardt sat there, almost without motion in body and feature, carrying the one look of intentness—listening, glowing, admiring, with an occasional breathless “Ah!” So wonderful in motionless vitality was the actress that her silence towered above the feats of Flambeau, even when the Flambeau was Coquelin.

The looking-glass scene was on the opening night something of a surprise. In the whole working-up of it Bernhardt was matchless in tensivity of dread and impotent wish to escape, but when she finally smashed the glass there was a drop. She pushed the chandelier timidly, backhanded, through the mirror, admirable psychologically, but avoiding a climax when theatrically one seemed called for. The next time I saw the play, she smashed the glass more violently, and the effect was stronger. The fourth act is a resting one, before the ordeal of the fifth, and this scene upon the field of Wagram was the only point in which the result was weaker than at the Knickerbocker. How such a mistake could be made it is not easy to understand. The mystical echoes and visions of the place, instead of being dimly given in the distant background, were noise to the ear and literal and lively ghosts to the eye, so that attention was

forced away from the Eaglet in the foreground, and what in reading seems the high point, dramatically, of the play, looked like cheap theatrical machinery. Bernhardt corresponded, and, competing with all the noise and shows, brought out the slightly lessened force and beauty of her voice rather than her priceless remaining gifts. At the end she was again herself. The well-known, languid, tender, and hopeless way in which she has so often given the poetry, the horror, and the beauty of death was still hers, and made her acting worthy of its subject.

Coquelin, the versatile and wonderfully finished actor, was not at his best in Flambeau. Of course, his almost unrivalled enunciation, his skill in make-up, and his general technical knowledge gave constant pleasure; but the comedian in him itched to get out, he secured illegitimate laughs, and he missed much of the impressiveness of Flambeau in forcing out the amusing side of him. The long scene with Metternich lost much through lack of mystery and of the suggestion of reality. The trick was kept apparent and, without the illusion, the scene dragged. He was at his best in the long speeches to the Duke and Marmont, in which his expertness in holding up the narrative for pages at a time was remarkable, and the comedian in him had a genuine and legitimate outlet in his exhibition of household and

other utensils bearing witness to Reichstadt's popularity. However, what came fairly second to Bernhardt's performance was the Metternich of Desjardin. Graceful, dignified, ominous, and unbending, in his ordinary demeanor, he rose in the mirror scene, where much of the hardest work was his, to a level where he kept Bernhardt's pace; and when he stretched out his hand, through the play, the embodiment of force contrasting with the Eaglet's weakness, authority, sitting lightly on a strong nature, was in every motion. It was a fine combination of power when power was needed and accomplishment in all details. The crowds were sufficient but ordinary, although better than those at the Knickerbocker. The acting of the minor characters, in many respects commonplace, was never bad, and had always one great merit: every point in the play (and there is a point every few lines) stood out salient and clear in outline.

The play itself, on a second seeing, seemed to me about the same, except that the difference between the vital poetry and true human drama, on the one hand, and the stage devices, on the other, was more striking; and while the merely stage effects are able, it is to be hoped that they will be still further subordinated in Rostand's next, as they have been in *L'Aiglon* compared to *Cyrano*. From a general dramatic point of

view some of the best speeches and scenes seem elongated, but it is to be remembered that *L'Aiglon* is a French epic—a national poem as well as a play—and it was written for Frenchmen.

Sarah Bernhardt's talent reminds me of a conversation with an able young actress.

"Did you like Bernhardt?"

"You remind me," she answered, "of the countryman who asked his friend if Niagara was nice."

There is a story somewhere, which she also told, about Oliver Wendell Holmes observing the famous waterfall; being asked by a stranger if it was not magnificent, Mr. Holmes answered that he should not have thought of applying adjectives to the sight, but that if it must be done, magnificent was certainly a correct epithet; whereupon the pleased stranger added that it was terribly magnificent.

Yet, great and indescribable as Madame Bernhardt's art is, it has not gone unquestioned. Colley Cibber and Horace Walpole were among those who sneered at Garrick, and there were always plenty to flout Rachel. The most enthusiastic praise of Bernhardt during this last engagement came from actors, who, in spite of jealousy and prejudice, are the best critics of acting. Other people praise or blame because they hap-

pen to like or dislike a temperament, or because an actress is a girl or an old woman. One of the most remarkable criticisms of Bernhardt was written by Turgénieff.

"Yes, I consider M. A——'s criticism of Sarah Bernhardt quite true and just. This woman is clever and skilful; she has her business at her finger ends, is gifted with a charming voice and educated in a good school; but she has nothing natural about her, no artistic temperament whatever, and she tries to make up for this by Parisian licentiousness. She is eaten through and through with *chic*, *réclame*, and *pose*. She is monotonous, cold and dry in short, without a single spark of talent in the highest sense of the word. Her gait is that of a hen; she has no play of features; the movements of her hands are purposely angular, in order to be piquant; the whole thing reeks of the boulevards, of *Figaro* and patchouli. You see that to my mind M. A—— has been even too lenient. You quote Zola as an authority, although you always rebel against all authorities, so you must allow me to quote Augier, who once said to me: 'Cette femme n'a aucun talent; on dit d'elle que c'est un paquet de nerfs — c'est un paquet de ficelles.' But you will ask, 'Why, then, such a world-wide reputation?' What do I care? I only speak my own feelings, and I am glad to find somebody who supports my view."

Well, when we watch the walk of Bernhardt in *L'Aiglon*, with its perfect imitation of a man, and then read the great Turgénieff's belief that she

had the gait of a hen ; when we are held by her face for minutes at a time when she has no words to speak, and then read that she has no play of features ; when we read the word "pose" used in a hostile sense, when her ability to pose is one of the greatest of her talents, we may well be inclined to think that criticism is a difficult venture, that an artist is usually a poor critic outside of his own special line, and that a world-wide reputation is a safer guide than the word of a Turgénieff or an Augier.





## CHAPTER XIV

PINERO, SHAW, AND JONES

*THE PRINCESS AND THE BUTTERFLY* first brought back, in recent years, the enthusiasm *Sweet Lavender* had aroused in me in college days, when Miriam O'Leary was the Lavender of the old Boston Museum Stock Company. This dear old comedy, possibly as nearly faultless as any of Pinero's plays, revived at the Murray Hill Theatre, with acting at least steady, faithful, and adequate, had its old charm, and I would much rather omit the average new play in an expensive theatre than miss the opportunity of seeing *Sweet Lavender* again. While the memories it conjured up were not the least fascinating part of an impression in which its past charms and its present qualities combine, my judgment approved my early choice. Wit, which has become harder in Pinero as it has become more striking, in this dainty picture is soft and friendly. Pathos, which in some of his later work has an unreal ring, especially when it becomes entangled with philosophy and social creed, is here pure and primitive. The stage-craft, already mature, is simple and broad, without the trail of the conscious expert upon it.

*The Princess and the Butterfly* saw the brilliant dramatist returning to the happy regions of comedy — older, more reflective, but still radiating the light of the comic understanding. At the Lyceum, in the fall of 1897, it was brilliantly acted. Alison Skipworth, as the stained glass window lady, was like the painting of a master in the distinction of her work; Julie Opp made her first American hit as the Princess; Edward Morgan could not have been better as Oriel; and the rest of the company, as originally distributed, made up one of the most pleasing ensembles in my memory. How delightful the comedy really is, was proved to me when it was revived, in the fall of 1900, by the Murray Hill Company, for it retained, slightly dimmed by lack of elegance and finish in the acting, those broad, roomy vistas, those flashes of wit, now keen, now tempered, that made it such a joy at the Lyceum Theatre.

Another play which stretched in my experience from the Boston Museum to the Murray Hill was *The Magistrate*, and it pleased me more even than it used to do. How infinitely better is this able and buoyant farce than most of the French emasculations which are sprung upon us in such rapid procession! It was well acted, too. And, at the same theatre, *The Amazons*, with all the delightful stage qualities of what Pinero calls his "farcical romance," as fresh and inspiring as

if they were now seen for the first time. The play is not literature; it does not read particularly well, but how it does act! The audience was in such a roar that much of the dialogue had to be lost; and in the scene where the girls exercise to piano music, the performance was interrupted for an unfortunately long time by the clamors of the house. When Pinero doesn't try to be a philosopher, but merely gives himself up to fun, the degree to which he knows how to express his humor in a manner effective before the footlights is an ever fresh cause for enthusiasm. A more buoyant, smooth, and rollicking comedy than this half farce and half romance is not often found.

*Lady Bountiful*, also a Murray Hill revival, contains some of this extremely skilful playwright's deft technique, and it is full of that simple and conventional sentiment in which he is so much more at home than he is in certain problematic subtleties. Ibsen, on his own ground, can give Pinero cards and spades; but when it comes not to intellectual intricacies but to ordinary love stories,—not to *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* and *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, but to *Sweet Lavender* and *The Amazons*,—from whom need the English expert ask a handicap? *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, famous as it is, and much as actresses use it,—Duse, Mrs. Campbell, Miss

Nethersole, Mrs. Kendal, and others, — in spite of its technical skill, is artificial and unconvincing, as Mr. Pinero always is when he is most serious. The comic passages in *Mrs. Tanqueray* are worth all the rest.

So with *The Profligate*, which Olga Nethersole revived in New York with bad support. The seriousness of *The Profligate* is broken by less wit than is usually to be found in Pinero, even in his problem plays, and what there is was treated mercilessly by this company. It is a much better play to act than to read, because Pinero knows the stage, and he is a rather mechanical moralist. Miss Nethersole herself gave a powerful performance, marred only by repetition and exaggerated deliberation. She proved that she was an actress by giving this sentimental prude as well as she gives the unrestrained women of passion.

The use of the happy ending really seems too bad. The situation itself might as well, if not better, have been handled for a happy outcome; but Pinero has not done this. He has written three acts, and most of the last, in a manner demanding a catastrophe, and then has given a choice of endings, the actor naturally choosing the comfortable one. A profligate marries an "innocent" girl, without telling about his past. She learns it. Now, a play in which she should adjust herself to this uncomfortable discovery and

continue to enjoy life with the man who, after all, remains what he has been, ever since she has known him, with good qualities of his own, might be perfectly true to life. It might be made to seem just; but every point in the actual play bends in the opposite direction, so that the cheerful dénouement is a flagrant artistic error.


With these beliefs, I naturally rejoice in Mr. Pinero's recent return to comedy, beginning in *The Princess and the Butterfly*, and growing more unmistakable in *Trelawny of the Wells* and *The Gay Lord Quex*. *Trelawny* is a charming bit of contemporary mood and comment, and, like *The Princess and the Butterfly*, it has been more successful in America than in England. It is also solidly founded enough to promise a good deal of permanence. Its chances of entering the short list of lasting plays would be better if the final scene were a more integral part of the whole, a more inevitable gathering together of the threads in the narrative, more of a climax and less of a makeshift; but even in its present form the comedy marches so perfectly up to and including the point in the last act where two actors of the old school, shelved by the new taste, discuss their sorrows, that it can endure the let-down at the end. The rehearsal with which the piece concludes is interesting in itself, especially to the confirmed theatre-goer, but it is too slight and

special for a climax. It is not a good medium to converge the moods and thoughts of the entire play, in which it marks a weakness, which was even more noticeable in *The Princess and the Butterfly*. The earlier comedy aimed higher, but *Trelawny* hits the target more frequently. In *Trelawny*, what sentiment there is is so well imbued with humor that only in one or two spots, especially in a speech by Rose about the player world, is the wooden ring heard again.

The most important element of a play is its theme, and *Trelawny* deals with a perennially attractive subject,—the world of paint and foot-lights, set against the decorous dullness of Cavendish Square. The life of mimetics has proved its solidity as dramatic material by a long line of durable plays, to all of which *Trelawny* is in some respects superior. There are touches in this last addition to the list which will be seen only by actors, playwrights, managers, and theatrical enthusiasts, but on its broad lines it is made of elements of human nature which are clear and important to all the thinking world. Acting is not a trade which tends to stability and dignity of character, but it encourages sensibility and flashes of warm instinct. Extreme alertness to praise and blame, harmoniously combined with vanity and absorption in one topic, are almost a necessity of the occupation; but this existence,

however narrowed and distorted, has the primal virtues of vividness and vitality. It not only depicts human passions, but it requires in its servants a varied and constantly ready fund of emotions and instincts. Lacking the free air of independence and impartial thought, it has to the full the warm breath of crude but passionate humanity. Pinero has put a group of actors against a background of Cavendish Square, and allowed them to carry all the sympathy of the audience with them. In feeling, however blind, in life, however fragmentary, the onlooker finds more to love than in all the dead decorum of a Philistine prosperity. Like a true comedian, the author shows the foibles of all his persons, even the most sympathetic; but, also with the truth which is the basis of comedy, he arranges the composition so that the more warmly beating hearts shall stand out triumphantly against the comic writer's abhorrence—dead conventionality.

For two reasons it is easy to have Pinero well acted. He is modern, and he is an actor and a stage-manager, and writes plays for the actor of to-day as much as for the contemporary audience. In this latter respect, he comes into comparison with the great dramatists of the past. Sheridan and Shakespeare were managers, imbued with all the details of an actor's life, and when they wrote they remembered every little human pawn upon



the stage. It is as easy in *Trelawny* to make a hit in a subordinate rôle as in the leading parts: just as Launcelot Gobbo, Gratiano, Phœbe, Le Beau, and Adam give opportunities for brilliant success. Pinero, like his great predecessor, takes care of the actor, of his entrances, exits, speeches, and position on the stage, seldom leaving him stranded with the deadness of furniture, knowing himself how it feels to be victimized. Actors feel these possibilities, and will take small parts without grumbling in Pinero, as they will in Shakespeare or in Molière.

The other reason that it is easy to have Pinero well acted is that, being a practical stage-manager, a clever man, and not a poet or a prophet, he writes for actors of moderate ability. There is no immense demand, nothing calling for real creation. It would be easier to find several actors to do acceptably any part in Pinero than to unearth one wholly satisfactory Bob Acres, Tony Lumpkin, Tartuffe, or Malvolio, not only on account of the lack of training in these rôles, but because the older characters, being more largely conceived, make, for their full presentation, greater demands. Pinero's plays are so written that players can easily be found to fit them, and it was noticeable that essentially bad actors gave good performances in *Trelawny*. In a great play the actor has less chance to "fit" a part, because the personages



are generalizations, born of imagination. He has to be an *actor* to get out of himself, to re-create. *Trelawny* is not only a literary man's play, although to the literary sense it is a treat, but it is, even for Pinero, wonderfully adapted to the stage, so that a reading of the play, much as it gives, leaves no idea of the scenic triumph. This means not only, or principally, the quaint costumes, groupings, and manners, but every detail, down to the dialogue, calculated with such a nice instinct for stage effectiveness that it is far more in the theatre than out of the theatre. The "business"—that is, the incidental, complementary acting—is simply wonderful, such as few but Pinero could conceive.

If ever a play needed to be seen to be fully appreciated it is this one, but yet a few suggestions of the scenes and language may give a little of the flavor. In the opening act Tom Wrench, the playwright and actor, is shadowed out by his grim and yet gay humor. He is "still unrecognized, still confined, within the boundless and yet repressive limits of Utility," and when a pretty and successful actress confesses she has dreamed of him, he says, "Indigestion levels all ranks." Shortly after he has reason to exclaim, "What cats you all are, you girls!" and his rising actress friend replies (a thing done by Hilda Spong with a touch as light as gossamer): "Oh! oh, dear!

How vulgar—after the Olympic!” The sly hits at actor vanity are innumerable in these opening scenes. “There! isn’t she a dream? I dressed her.” And at their vulgarity, “My dear, follow the counsel of one who has sat at many a ‘good man’s feast’—have a little ‘am.” How the idea of their parts dominates them! One is responding to a toast to the queen, “Ladies and Gentlemen: I have played fourteen or fifteen queens in my time . . . and, as parts, they are not worth a tinker’s oath.” This banquet scene, where the players bid farewell to Rose Trelawny, is so rich that a little of the dialogue may be given in the vain effort to indicate to readers who have not seen it the fun of the whole.

*Arthur.* All I can say is that I regard Miss Trelawny in the light of a—a solemn charge, and I—I trust that, if ever I have the pleasure of—of meeting any of you again, I shall be able to render a good—a—a—satisfactory—satisfactory—

*Tom [in an audible whisper].* Account.

*Arthur.* Account of the way—of the way—in the which I—in which—[loud applause] Before I bring these observations to a conclusion, let me assure you that it has been a great privilege to me to meet—to have been thrown with—a band of artists—whose talents—whose striking talents—whose talents—

*Tom* [kindly, behind his hand]. Sit down.

*Arthur* [helplessly]. Whose talents not only interest and instruct the — the more refined residents of this district, but whose talents —

*Imogen* [quietly to *Colpoys*]. Get him to sit down.

*Arthur*. The fame of whose talents, I should say —

*Colpoys* [quietly to *Mrs. Mossop*]. He's to sit down. Tell Mother Telfer.

*Arthur*. The fame of whose talents has spread to — to regions —

*Mrs. Mossop* [quietly to *Mrs. Telfer*]. They say he is to sit down.

*Arthur*. To — to quarters of the town — to quarters —

*Mrs. Telfer* [to *Arthur*]. Sit down.

*Arthur*. Eh?

*Mrs. Telfer*. You finished long ago. Sit down.

On the truth of *Trelawny of the Wells* two true stories of New York actors seem to me to throw an amusing light. In a certain play of the year the principal male part was taken by an actor named A, who was succeeded by B. Shortly before the change B was met on the street by his friend C.

C. Have you seen A's performance?

B. Yes. Rotten!

C. Believe that if you must, old man, but for heaven's sake don't go about saying it.

B. Well, I saw it three times while I was working up the part. The first time, it seemed fair. The second, I was disappointed. The third, I saw there was nothing in it.

C. But you know every actor has good days and bad ones. All of us change from night to night.

B. So they tell me. I could never understand it. I never change. If I do, it is for the better.

That true story, of very well-known players, fits perfectly into the Gadd of *Trelawny*. Here is another of more general aspect:—

Some years ago a New York manager sent his stock company to see a good performance in Brooklyn by a No. 2 company of the same play in which the stock had originally appeared. The members of the home company praised highly the No. 2 performance, with the exception that each actor criticised severely only the person who played his or her part. "This," remarked the manager, "seems to be a peculiarity of the profession. There is no part that does not appear to the actor or actress within his or her reach. They merely bewail the want of 'opportunity,' and regard others who make successes merely as being 'lucky.' There are dozens of

actors who claim that they would be equally successful with Sothern, Nat Goodwin, or Drew, if they had a manager to 'push' and 'boom' them."

*Trelawny*, although it did fairly "on the road," was not as successful as in New York. The reason is suggested without being given in the following remarks made to me by a theatre-goer who lives in Stamford, but works in town and is altogether urban in character: "Stamford people go to the theatre only once a year. They are all married, you know, and they go on their wedding anniversaries. They stop at the Manhattan, because it's 'near.' No matter how rich they are, they only go once. And they all go to some one play.

"Stamford people are not so frowsy as you might think in some ways, but they are queer on the theatre. This year it is *The Christian*. It is the only play in town they have seen. One of them said to me the other day that her anniversary was approaching, and asked my advice. I suggested *Trelawny*.

"'What is that?' said she.

"'Oh, it's awfully good,' said I.

"'And what about *The Christian*?'

"'Oh, I don't think that's very amusing.'

"'Well, I guess I'll go to *The Christian*.'

"So with all of them. Viola Allen is popular

with the suburbanites, too. They all think the play is lovely. I don't know what the secret of it is. Last year it was *The Little Minister*, I forget the year before, but long ago it was *The Old Homestead*."

In Pinero's latest, *The Gay Lord Quex*, played by John Hare's company in New York in the fall of 1900, we had the most successful of all his recent plays. Its success here came not from its comedy features so much as from the dramatic qualities of the last half of the play. For straight theatrical effectiveness the third act probably surpasses anything else Pinero ever wrote.

This gifted dramatist has, with many of his best plays, fared better in America than in England. *The Princess and the Butterfly* and *Trelawny of the Wells* both ran longer here, and both are far better as comedy than *The Gay Lord Quex*, which, amusing enough in its two-comedy acts, contains few of those lines of complex humor that are so thickly scattered through its two immediate predecessors. Indeed, at the end of the second act it looked to me as if the greater popularity of *Quex* in England must be due to the mere vogue of the so-called *risqué*. Then, however, came a stretch of great acting drama—a third act of most intense interest followed by a fourth act so skilful that, in spite of its

being necessarily a solution, there was no let down.

Although what makes *The Gay Lord Quex* notable is mere stage-craft, some of the comedy is in Pinero's best vein. For instance:—

Various ladies, including Quex's aunt, the Countess of Owbridge, speak of a picture.

*Quex.* "Moses in the Bulrushes." What d'ye think of it?

*Lady Owbridge.* They treat such subjects nowadays with too little reverence.

*Frayne.* Too much Pharaoh's daughter and too little Moses.

*Sophy.* The man who is younger than he ought to be is always no better than he should be.

*Quex.* Poor women! Nevertheless, pray be careful how you slight the manicure trade. Crazes die, you know—nails grow.

*Mrs. Eden.* Is his Grace still very unwell?

*Duchess.* He is still over seventy.

*Mrs. Eden.* May I look at your literature?

*Mrs. Eden.* *Le Calvaire d'une vierge. Lune de Miel. Les Aventures de Madame Plon.* Oh, I've heard of this! This is a little—h'm!—isn't it?

*Duchess.* I read those things for the sake of their exquisitely polished style; the subjects escape me.

*Mrs. Eden* [seating herself by the writing table and dipping into "*Madame Plon*"]. Ah, yes, the style—the style. [Absorbed.] We haven't much real literary style in England, have we?

*The Gay Lord Quex* is not a "problem play." It does not belong in the class of *The Profligate*, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*, or *The Benefit of the Doubt*.

These plays fix the mind on some principle, more or less in the form of a question about ethics. *The Princess and the Butterfly*, on the other hand, is not a problem play, because, although it is on the theme of middle age and its possibilities, there is no argument and no solution. It merely presents things, like a proper comedy. So with the contrast between fashionable society and actors in *Trclawny of the Wells*—it is a picture and not a thesis.

*The Gay Lord Quex* gives people who wish it the opportunity to discuss the advisability of marrying a reformed rake to a regularly bred young woman, but it does not force that question, or any other. It merely tells an exciting story about the attempt of Quex to get the girl, and



of the manicurist to thwart him, and the play is made up of wit, diversion, and dramatic action, not of intellectual question or suggestion. Therefore, although it is not as pure a comedy as many of Pinero's early plays, or his two preceding ones, it by no means belongs to his group of thesis dramas.

The two salient elements of the play's popular success in New York, at least, were the third act and the work of Miss Vanbrugh. Mr. Hare's picture of Quex was drawn by an artist, and it was perfectly legitimate, since a *roué* has no particular appearance in real life; but on the stage the public expects to see certain traits associated with this animal, and Mr. Hare was not wholly the public's conception of a libertine. Actually, the very fact that Quex was able to choose successfully another road, and thus prove that he was not irretrievably destined by Providence for that trade alone, is a reason why he should not look as if he were assigned to that part by every attribute of his being. Whatever the justice of the case, psychologically, the popular approval of his performance would have been increased if Mr. Hare had made Quex rather broader. It would be hard to find a more dramatic moment than the one when Quex turns on the manicure girl and tells her what kind of a cat she is. Mr. Hare delivered that rebuke with stinging distinctness

and elegant superiority, and Miss Vanbrugh cowered under it with pain most graphically, and yet most moderately, written in her face and posture. Another moment equally dramatic comes a few moments later, when, after Quex has apparently won the battle in which generalship was equal but he occupied the stronger position, the manicure girl saves herself unintentionally by a last wild impulse of devotion to her friend. Both actors again did admirably there. A notable aspect of Miss Vanbrugh's triumph here was the satisfaction taken in it by the profession. It had no resemblance to certain vulgar furores that have taken the town within the last few years, or to certain others built up by the cleverest of management. It was the result of the most finished and intelligent work, excellent in every detail, from the little expressions of class peculiarities to the big situations.

I think there is nothing more purely dramatic in Pinero than this bit out of the third act:—

*Sophy.* You—you are an awful blackguard, my lord.

*Quex.* Thank you, my dear. But you're not far wrong—I was a blackguard till I met Miss Eden, and now, losing Miss Eden, perhaps, I'm going to be a bigger blackguard than before. At the same time, you know, there's not much to choose between us; for you're a low spy, an

impudent, bare-faced liar, a common kitchen-cat, who wriggles into the best rooms, gets herself fondled, and then spits. Therefore I've no compunction in making you pay your share of this score, my dear Sophy — none whatever.

He gallantly offers her the sofa. She thinks of the jealousy of her lover and the certain loss of him after this scandal, and her courage falters. She moans and pleads, and all in vain.

Quex has conquered. She will hold her tongue. He dictates a compromising letter from her to him as a safeguard, takes it, and gives her the key.

She is going, when a thought crosses her mind that makes her gasp.

*Sophy.* Ah! stop a bit! No, I won't!

*Quex.* What's the matter with you?

*Sophy.* Why, it's like selling Muriel! Just to get myself out of this, I'm simply handing her over to you! I won't do it! I won't! [*She rushes to the bell-rope, and tugs at it again and again.*] She shan't marry you! She shan't! I've said she shan't, and she shan't! Oh, let your precious duchess go scot free! After all, what does it matter who the woman is you've been sporting with, so that Miss Muriel is kept from falling into your clutches! Yes, I'll make short work of you, my lord. The ladies shall hear from my mouth of the lively half hour I've spent with you, and how I've suddenly funkcd

the consequences and raised a hullabaloo! Now, my lord! Now then! Now then!

*Quex.* By God, you're a fine plucked 'un! I've never known a better. No, my girl, I'm damned if you shall suffer! Quick! Listen! Pull yourself together!

*Sophy.* Eh? eh?

*Quex.* Here's your letter. Take it. I won't have it.

He unlocks the door and lets her go. But the servants are answering the bell, and first Quex has to teach the hysterical Sophy how to quiet them. Then:—

*Quex.* Be off. Go to bed. Serve me how you please. Miss Fullgarney, upon my soul, I—I humbly beg your pardon.

*Sophy.* Oh! oh! Oh, God bless you! you—you—you're a gentleman! I'll do what I can for you!

That summary ought to show better than any words of praise what a superb acting machine this third act is. It has all the mere stress of situation that a Sardou could get up at his best, with the infinitely superior fineness of a Pinero.

George Bernard Shaw is another man whose comedy has succeeded somewhat better in America than in England, and his published volumes have added to our familiarity with his work.

Mr. Shaw, who is known as a writer, a dramatist, and a political economist of the socialistic type, has exhibited all three aspects of himself in his volumes. Not only has he infused socialism and essays on men and things into his plays, but he has elucidated himself and all his theories, hopes, and fears in elaborate prefaces. Mr. Shaw is one of those artists who need to explain. The greater part of his life is devoted to proving that things ought to be some other way. He does not look upon the fact that he was born to set the joints of time as a "cursed spite," like the late Hamlet; far from it. Universal intellectual surgery is what he most enjoys. His principal grief seems to be that the joints won't set when he tells them to. Finding the social system which had been painfully worked out by the world through so many centuries fundamentally unwise, he told in a loud and fearless voice about a better one which he had thought out. Very little happened. Finding the stage devoted to drama, which, in his opinion, existed only because some people fooled all the other people into imagining they liked it, he said, "Go to, I will exhibit a play of the proper kind." The exhibition was attended with difficulties. The public has the same opinion of Mr. Shaw that Mr. Shaw has of the public, and the position of the multitude is the stronger, inasmuch as Mr. Shaw seeks its conversion while

it doesn't care in the least what ideals disturb the rest of Mr. Shaw. He can rail month after month at the superstition which pretends to enjoy Shakespeare. Meantime Irving, Robertson and Tree, Mansfield and Sothorn, get rich out of that worthy bard. He can expound with passionate superiority the inside glory of Ibsen, and the world patiently keeps out of hearing. Mr. Shaw is a voice in the wilderness, not very happy, but preferring prophesying to any other form of activity.

Mr. Shaw's explanation of his failure as a novelist and dramatist is that his intellectual eyesight is normal, whereas most other persons are myopic, astigmatic, or cross-eyed. Only one-tenth of the world sees as he does; therefore only one-tenth will read him, and they don't, because they are poor. Why do the other nine-tenths applaud some one artist? Why, because they are all cross-eyed, myopic, long-sighted, astigmatic — all except the normal, who see things just as he does. Shakespeare has such a singular defect of vision that the man whose eyes turn in and the man whose eyes turn out, the creature who sees only distant spots and he who holds the book to his nose, the one with the cataract and the one with astigmatism, all see the truths — or rather errors — which he depicts, while the really and truly truths of G. B. Shaw escape them, on

account of these ocular defects. Such, with some slight changes in expression, is the moral of his prefaces, and it is a moral which he introduces also into all of his dramas.

Three of his plays have been seen in the United States of America. One ran a short time, although Mr. Mansfield has used it occasionally since in his repertoire, and plays it delightfully. It is called *Arms and the Man*, and is composed of the following string of propositions: 1, heroes in the ordinary sense are fools; 2, true heroes are realists, who are always cool and talk sense; 3, they are cynical like Mr. Shaw, but they dominate the women and "cut ice" generally; 4, examples may be seen in the conduct of soldiers. *Arms and the Man* is powerful in one place, the first act, which is a dramatic situation. There are two other acts mainly devoted to expounding the moral and to making the story come out right in the dear old way. One who will read that first act only may see what Mr. Shaw might be if he were not an evangelist. It is a singular and almost universal proposition that when men in whom the faculty of making abstract propositions is greater than the interest for creating situations, plots, and characters undertake drama or fiction, the opening is always better than the ending. It is his conception of the dénouement or catastrophe that

mainly makes the dramatist, because that final event bears in itself the marks of the train of incidents that have led up to it. The philosopher writing a play begins at the other end. He says: "Here is an interesting situation. It means so-and-so. How can I push it along and make a story out of it?"

*The Devil's Disciple* was a really popular success, probably because Mr. Shaw made more concessions and used in several places very ordinary melodrama. Nevertheless, as wit so keen as this Irishman's is rare, and as Mr. Mansfield never showed more ease, spirit, enjoyment, satire, and distinction than he did in this part, one forgets the melodramatic side, the improbability of the rescue element, and is free to feel the buoyant wit of the author, so admirably expressed by the actor. Mr. Mansfield's performance had changed slightly for the better when I saw him again, two years after he first appeared in it. He played the opening act with more enthusiasm and perhaps with a trifle too obvious attitudes. Surely nobody could do better the exchange of wit in the later scenes with the minister, his wife, and General Burgoyne. One thing in which he differed from the first night was a decided gain. Then he suggested some tenderness for the woman in the best scene in the play, the one in which he



spurns her love. Later he treated her almost coldly, as if his uprightness went so far that the taste of love, thrown hastily at him because he had dealt decently with the minister, were really almost unpleasant to him. The bit of dialogue at this point is worth the whole of an ordinary play. Dudgeon explains at length that he has risked his life, not for the minister, not even for the minister's wife, but only to follow the law of his own nature.

"Then you do not love me?" says the woman.

"Is that *all* that means to you?" asks he.

"What *worse* could it mean to me?" is her reply.

If *The Man of Destiny*, which enjoyed a single performance by the Empire School, never has a stage life, it will be the worse for the theatre. Mr. Shaw properly guided could give the present-day drama a fantastic and original brilliancy which would raise in reputation both him and it, although he is apparently too perverse and bigoted to take a rational attitude toward the practical problem of modifying his idiosyncrasies enough to keep them from choking his talents. *The Man of Destiny* is probably a better one-act play, even from the theatrical point of view, than any other written in a long time, and in addition to its acting qualities it has, with a few of the

author's pet faults, wit and freshness in high degree. When a final judgment comes to be pronounced, it is to be feared that Mr. Shaw will not be among those whose talents have been employed at the highest legal rate of interest, for what he loves most is the frail little theory, all his own, as a mother cherishes her feeblest offspring.

*Cashel Byron's Profession*, Mr. Shaw's novel, was dramatized by an actor named Harrison J. Wolfe, and given a trial performance at the Herald Square Theatre in December, 1900. It was so bad a dramatization, so terribly acted, that no test was made of the truth of Mr. Shaw's reported opinion that in this novel there was no possibility of a play.

*Candida* was put in rehearsal by Mr. Mansfield and abandoned, because, Mr. Shaw says, the actor could not embody the poet physically. This play is worth noticing, because it is the author's most distinct effort at poetic conception. (I speak, of course, in the ordinary sense, with apologies.) The central figure is a woman. Our dramatist never leaves us to flounder through the events and speeches of a play to see what the characters are, but frankly tells us. Here is a fraction of one stage direction:—

"Startled, they turn quickly and find that Candida has just come in, and is looking at them with an amused maternal indulgence which is her characteristic expression. She is a woman of thirty-three, well built, well nourished, likely, one guesses, to become matronly later on, but now quite at her best, with the double charm of youth and motherhood. Her ways are those of a woman who has found that she can always manage people by engaging their affection, and who does so frankly and instinctively without the smallest scruple. So far, she is just like any other pretty woman who is just clever enough to make the most of her sexual attractions for trivially selfish ends; but Candida's serene brows, courageous eyes, and well-set mouth and chin signify largeness of mind and dignity of character to ennoble her in winning the affections. A wise-hearted observer, looking at her, would at once guess that whoever had placed the Virgin of the Assumption over her hearth did so because he fancied some spiritual resemblance between them, and yet would not suspect either her husband or herself of any such idea, or, indeed, of any concern with the art of Titian."

There! That job is off, so there is no need of fussing to show all that in the story. Then we have a poet—oh, but a real poet.

"He is a strange, shy youth of eighteen, slight,

effeminate, with a delicate, childish voice, and a hunted, tormented expression and shrinking manner that show the painful sensitiveness that very swift and acute apprehensiveness produces in youth before the character has grown to its full strength. Yet everything that his timidity and frailty suggest is contradicted by his face. He is miserably irresolute, does not know where to stand or what to do with his hands and feet, is afraid of Burgess, and would run away into solitude if he dared; but the very intensity with which he feels a perfectly commonplace position shows great nervous force, and his nostrils and mouth show a fiercely petulant wilfulness, as to the quality of which his great imaginative eyes and fine brow are reassuring. He is so entirely uncommon as to be almost unearthly; and to prosaic people there is something noxious in this unearthliness, just as to poetic people there is something angelic in it. His dress is anarchic."

Well, this pleasant person loves Candida and explains poetry to her. In the end she shows her faithfulness to her commonplace husband and her superiority to both of them. It is good reading, but I am inclined to fear that it is not a play.

*You Never Can Tell*, which has been acted in England, but not here, is most remarkable for Mr. Shaw's best gift, dialogue. It is a modern

counterpart of Congreve, nearer to his brilliancy than anything else of the day, for Gilbert's is of a wholly different species. As in *Arms and the Man*, the first act is the best and the last the weakest, so that it could not hold the stage long unless some one else remodelled it; but it shows what a valuable dramatist Mr. Shaw might be if he confined himself to collaboration, furnishing scenes and dialogue to somebody with the dramatic instinct.

All these plays except *The Devil's Disciple*, which was published later, are in the second volume, called Pleasant. The Unpleasant ones are in a volume by themselves. The designation is sarcastic. It means unpleasant to the stupid public, because two of them contain more social philosophy and less entertainment. *Widowers' Houses* is altogether worthless to anybody who doesn't find the condition of the London poor an entertaining theme for a play. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is much stronger in execution, contains more light, and has the merit, so unusual with Mr. Shaw, of being pretty well sustained to the very end. It deals, however, with a vice which would bar it from our stage. *The Philanderer* is a farce, not so clever as *You Never Can Tell*, but full of the author's brilliancy.

Mr. Shaw is a man with flashes of sparkling wit of a kind all his own, and therefore with

flashes of wisdom also, and not entirely without gifts of narration and description ; but he is held stationary by the constant desire to defend what he can do best and to attack what he cannot do at all, making his plays theses, his heroes parodies of himself, and his absurd characters parodies of those persons who admire anything which contrasts with Mr. Shaw. This character turns off a miscellaneous stream of brilliancy and childishness, which is better in criticism, where the reader can select, than in drama, which must hold the sympathy of many kinds of people for three consecutive hours.

Henry Arthur Jones is a harder puzzle than any other dramatist living. A few of his plays seem to me among the most distinguished work of the time, and others the merest sentimentality and machinery. Among those given in America *Mrs. Dane's Defence* is certainly the best since *The Case of Rebellious Susan*. That these plays came from the same man who wrote *The Manceuvres of Jane* is not easy to think. Mr. Jones has had the experience of pleasing the people almost always, but of satisfying the critics most when he pleased the people least. William Archer, writing about *Michael and His Lost Angel*, for instance, says Mr. Jones "has enriched not our theatre only, but our literature," and thinks

that for certain important literary qualities it cannot be matched in modern fiction or drama; and George Bernard Shaw thinks the author has a "knowledge of spiritual history in which Mr. Jones's nearest competitors seem so stupendously deficient." That play, however, was rejected on sound grounds by the public. It aimed high, but it missed fire. Mr. Jones's ends, as shown in his numerous critical essays on the drama, are excellent; but he does not always realize them. In *Mrs. Dane's Defence* he has written a play deserving at once popular success and critical approval.

Almost without interruption the story grows as a plant grows, or as a tale does in the hands of a born story-teller, as I think Mr. Archer has called Mr. Jones, moving on through forces inside of it, not pushed along by the author. As story-telling on the stage, as construction in its essentials and in its details, this play for three acts equals anything on the contemporary English stage, and ranks with Sudermann and Hauptmann, at times almost with Ibsen. The fourth act is a drop, but not a bad one until the end, when there is a heavy dose of pure slop. Why the man who had written the play added the stuff which follows Mrs. Dane's final exit, is as far beyond surmise as is much else in this most puzzling author. If the curtain fell on this exit, there would be nothing in the play to call to mind

the incomprehensible feebleness that accompanies Mr. Jones's notable dramatic powers.

*Mrs. Dane's Defence* treats a subject without exploiting it enough to incur the charge of being a problem play. Until the end the social meanings of the drama are kept within the story itself, and are therefore only an integral virtue of the drama. When they are made express in the last act it is with so much moderation, in such good style, and under such appropriate dramatic circumstances, that the explanation is no more a fault theatrically than are some of the tirades of which the younger Dumas has made dramatic climaxes. The story begins to move at the very opening, and the manner in which the interests are all converged before the end of the first act shows skill of a high quality. The figures are familiar, to be sure, but all are so vitally woven into the story as to win distinction from their dynamic positions. Mrs. Dane is a fresh creation. As far from the erring woman who exclaims and explains, à la Tanqueray, as she is from the old adventuress, she is a being, created, living before us, who has committed certain blunders and feels the iron consequences closing, as slowly as the mills of the gods, upon every part of her quivering soul. The running down of this creature by society is the theme. Chivalrous men believe in her or lie for her, a detective is bribed



by her, a generous woman aids her, her own wits fight most gallantly for her; but the struggle is an impossible one, the first misplay is bound to come, and the driven woman, who exclaims wildly in the second act that, having begun the game, she can see it through, is brought to earth by her first stumble in the third. The first curtain sees her, after some successful and fairly confident lying, resting against a door and hearing with dread fatigue the gayety outside. The second sees her possessing her young lover, but gasping with the perils which have just dramatically ended with the public false declaration of the detective, which clears her. The third sees her hopeless at last, stripped to the skin by the calm and friendly cross-examination of a great lawyer, and unable to weaken his sense of fact and necessity as she has in the cases of other men. The long scene in this act, in which, after fully believing in her, Sir Lionel Carteret is first puzzled by omissions in her story, then troubled by contradictions, then convinced of her mendacity, is the climax of the play, and one of the most genuine exhibitions of dramatic power in the recent history of the English stage. As able as the third act of *The Gay Lord Quex*, it is far less theatrical and more human, natural, and lasting. The acting of Margaret Anglin here, as elsewhere, was worthy of the opportunity. In the first act the hunted look in

her graphic face was slight, momentary, inconclusive, so that the spectator could not see any more than the people on the stage the hidden truth about her. Miss Anglin has a face made for the stage, on which her quick intelligence and faultless taste can cast complicated expressions, which carry perfectly, although the merest hints. In the second act, continuing her rare perfection in detail, she gave an exhibition of straight force in her broken-hearted appeal to the detective to save her, the moving truth of her plea painted in face, body, and tone, with the power of sincere feeling in the actress checked and guided by the intricate calculations or instincts of an unusual artistic nature, composing a whole picture and looking forward to the third act as well as back to the first. In the third the brilliant young artist rose higher than she had ever before risen in New York. Having done small parts, as in *The Only Way*, perfectly, she proceeded to do a big emotional scene with equal perfection. In every step of the severe task, in which she had to show a woman of deep and passionate nature fighting for her life and her love, making a noble battle in a losing cause, grasping at straw, despairing, then rallying, and, finally, when all is lost, submitting, appealing, despairing, in all this Miss Anglin was true and fine, with unconventionality, naturalness, and control of her talents. The last act,

in which she quietly tried logic, was out-argued by Sir Daniel, and went off into obscurity to live for her nameless child, was done with a rightness and poise that kept it from being any drop, histrionically, from the third. If only the play might end with the conclusion of the argument, instead of with the feeble sentimentality of the terrible and pervading young girl, who, in this case, enters and kisses the sleeping boy, after another bad little love scene between Sir Daniel and a widow!

One of the most successful among the Jones plays in America was *The Liars*. When Sir Christopher Deering and Edward Falkner, charming gentleman and knightly hero respectively, have quarrelled and are about to part, each turns at the appointed time, just before one has reached the rear door.

"Kit!" cries one.

"Ned!" the other cries.

That is too often Jones when he is touching. When he is humorous, he belongs to a mixed species. His *Liars* is a kind of mongrel, half artificial and half natural, not sparkling enough to be a polished artifice or intelligent enough for a comedy of nature.

Yet *The Liars* is entertaining. I laughed—everybody laughed. Among the causes of its attraction is its swelldom. Everybody is distin-

guished, much dressed, Four Hundredy, good, with a spice of wickedness held at arm's length. Wouldn't that attract anybody? Then some of the actors were dressed in really exquisite taste, the others as well as they knew how; the scenery was pretty, and what more would you have?

Mr. Drew was not the central figure. To Miss Irving fell the leading rôle. She was Lady Jessica, frivolous, attractive, venturesome, and timid — married to an old man, in short. Some plots must be told, but this is not one of them. One scene follows another, as in a kaleidoscope, — when we are tired of one, there is another, — not as in a drama, where each scene demands the next. Lady Jessica goes to a supper with a man who loves her, is discovered, calls on her friends for help, and involves all the stage people in lies. Of the resulting situations, the best is in the third act, where the problem is suddenly solved by a passionate admission of the truth. Mr. Drew, of course, used his own grace and humor; but in these days he often undertakes parts that are such kindergarten work for him that there is not much interest in analyzing the result. Still, it is a pleasure to see a long and dull speech carried off with the skill with which he delivered one in the last act. Miss Irving was best in the most serious parts. She got the idea of the arti-

figial flirt, but lent no variety to it. It had no "tone."

"If you are married to a charming woman and do not continue to make love to her, some other man will."

Laughter and agreement. It is true, of course, and it gives the flavor of the dialogue.

Of elopement with a married woman, Mr. Drew says: "It is all right, theoretically, and might do in another planet, but here it won't work. I tell you, it won't work. Now, we English are not one whit better than our neighbors, but, thank heaven, we pretend we are, and make it hot for anybody who interferes with that pretence."

Analyze the success of that speech, and you have much of what Mr. Jones is at his most successful.

The fact that *The Manœuvres of Jane* succeeded in England, though it did rather poorly in America, simply illustrates the fact that an utterly commonplace article may enjoy a large sale. This effusion has no wit, though it has some humor. It lacks grace, distinction, meaning, and form; but it has vivacious spirits, and buoyancy is much. Moreover, though the dialogue is so flat that it would hardly be fit to print, the "business" is in places broadly and really comic, especially when skilfully carried

out by the actors. The performance at Daly's was far above the merits of the play. Indeed, as an exhibition of acting, it was worth seeing by the kind of persons who will hardly find any great inspiration in the drama itself. A number of players did well. It can hardly be expected that the general public should see clearly any except the prominent performers. In places like Paris, where there is a large concourse of critical and intellectual theatre-goers, an actor who does a little well gets his reward, and therefore great actors have often no objection to minor parts. Well, in doing almost nothing as Trendell, a maid, — a few words, a few steps, a few glances, — Alison Skipworth executed her part with such exquisite justness, definiteness, and measure that she gave me a thrill of satisfaction with her small bit. Many of the others were good, but I will speak now only of the central part. Mary Mannering illustrated an important truth in the relation between the play and the actor. She played her part well, but she put into it just as much seriousness as it could possibly hold, probably a good deal more than Mr. Jones ever intended it to hold. This distinction between the part as written and the part as acted is an almost impossible one for the spectator, as the play passes rapidly before him, to grasp, and there is no greater difficulty in dramatic criticism. Miss Mannering's

performance was certainly one of the most attractive features of the evening; but to say whether the play would have gained or lost by the broad acting which the author doubtless intended is pretty nearly impossible.

As for the play, between it and some dramas which have less success the proverb might be well parted. They have the grace of art; it has enough.

## CHAPTER XV

### OTHER BRITISH IMPORTATIONS

MR. GILBERT has given us no plays for a long time, but actresses now and then put on *Comedy and Tragedy* in this country, *Sweethearts* was seen in the vaudeville houses recently, and *Pygmalion and Galatea* is the most popular of all. The newest *Galatea* seen in New York, and the only prominent American one since Julia Marlowe and Mary Anderson, was Julia Arthur. In celebrating the beauty and humor of the play I might waste pages in the futile effort to express the feelings aroused by such a wholly masterly work of art. If Gilbert does not deserve to stand with Sheridan, what English dramatist since Sheridan is to be in permanent fame his rival? When that rich man of whom we dream establishes his ideal theatre, if he is not too patriotic not to allow foreign plays, surely not only *Pygmalion and Galatea*, one of the very finest comedies in the language, but many of Gilbert's, from poetry to farce, will again delight us. Julia Arthur gave an attractive *Galatea* on untraditional but intelligent lines, making one of the faculties with which



the statue was so suddenly gifted a playful sense of incongruity, subdued enough in expression not to clash with the almost constant mock-solemnity of Gilbert's humor. A friend sitting with me before this play, a retired actor who had played Pygmalion, said: "Every line of Gilbert's has so much that the play gains every time it is seen. It is one of those dramas which, to enjoy fully, must be so familiar that the hearer feels the point of a line with the first word. If he has to wait for the last word, he loses half; for the next line is loaded with a new charm to be missed while he is waking up to the last."

Of Oscar Wilde, as nothing new of his was played for some time before his death, I will simply record that when the Murray Hill Theatre revived *Lady Windermere's Fan*, the close and able construction and brilliant language stood out as fresh as ever, and convinced me that this play has a long life before it on the stage.

As we have had in America nothing new of Mr. Barrie's since *The Little Minister*, as that fascinating comedy has been frequently referred to in these pages, and as in the reading *The Wedding Guest* seems a big drop from *The Professor* and *The Little Minister*, I pass over him

also to speak of others who have done good work, and whose number shows that the present English stage, although lacking genius, is on a level higher than any it has reached more than two or three times before in its history. *Peter the Great*, in the reading, seems to me one of the most notable achievements of the contemporary English stage; but as I have seen neither that nor *Godefroï and Yolande*, Mr. Laurence Irving does not fall within this chapter.


Better than mawkishness is the hard glitter of Carton and the smart school, but it is a pleasure to turn to true humor and to sound and virile sentiment.

*The Tyranny of Tears* by Haddon Chambers, given in America by John Drew, is one of the best comedies of our time. It is high comedy, too, which makes it an apparition at once cheering and almost startling. The taste of an Empire audience scored one for itself by liking it. What a place to become confused about life the Empire Theatre is, where an audience that enjoys the worst products of the times enjoys also the best; but, perhaps, in that respect, the audience is like New York, New York is like democracy, and democracy is the fullest expression of the human race. At any rate, to speak plain English for a moment, and thus excuse further vaga-

ries, *The Tyranny of Tears* is a play which the solid and cultivated man of thought and expression, and the young girl full of superlatives and ignorance, and all the various complex fragments of the nation might see with the assurance that their minds would not be taxed (which some of them hate), while at the same time their taste would be improved and their intelligence fed, with perfect safety to all departments of their moral passions, principles, and prejudices.

What makes it so good? Above all, it is because in its main elements it is original. It is not "new," "novel," and all the other kinds of trivial commonplace; but it is original in the sense of fully digested, intelligent, and immediate. Goethe, you doubtless remember, defined originality as saying what is said every day by thousands as if it had never been said by any one. The theme of this comedy is not in any way odd. It is simple and human. It has the true comic spirit, in the sense in which Meredith for instance explains comedy in his famous essay, because it sees, with a cheerful, unprejudiced gaze, the facts of human nature uncolored and undistorted. The essence of comedy is to be intellectual, and the essence of intellect is to see complex things simply. Marriage is the theme of this comedy. What could be made more commonplace? What *is* more commonplace in most of the plays that

deal with it? What, on the other hand, is more eternally full of life and dark and charm and trouble for the capable artist, as for the capable liver? Mr. Chambers shows the hand that lives in his very first lines. A literary man is a dangerous figure for literature. He is not interesting enough. The centre of a play should be a man or a woman, and not a specialist. You might as well go seriously into the details of plumbing as into those of writing. Therefore it was with fear that I observed that the hero was an author. No trouble came, however, for that fact was kept subordinate and practically forgotten in the facts that he was a husband, a lover, a friend, a man—all-important things these, not to be ousted by any triviality like trade or art. He begins to dictate an answer to some fellow-sinner, whose crimes have just appeared in *The Fortnightly Review*. His language is superb in its conscious, well-calculated commonplace. He says that his enemy's iconoclasm is its own reward. He rolls up something grand about smug sufficiency. He is well under way, and his style grows ominously. But this task is interrupted. First it is the telephone. An adroit touch that, postponing and yet preparing the real subject, another kind of interruption. Then it is the wife. She comes all radiance into the room. She will be delighted, when she sees her husband busy, to sit down and



listen. Does even that disturb him? Then he does not love her. She weeps. Does he speak lower to his secretary? Then he prefers his typewriter to his wife. She weeps again. Her love is an absorbing, enriching passion, full of idiocy and nerves. A ring is heard. The wife goes out and returns radiant, having saved her husband from the interruption of a visit, — from one of his best friends, whom he has not seen for years. Happy and tactful wife. The husband bellows out of the window, and recalls his friend.

Then they talk over the past as we all do when we may. Ah, this was one of the most charming of men. No, he never comes to the home of the married couple now. He just stopped, after a little. So with the others. One after the other, they all stopped; for one reason or another, or none; but they stopped. One was married, and their wives didn't somehow seem to take to each other. Of course the husband no longer goes to the club. Why should he? Hasn't he his home? Still, he only half knows his slavery, for he accepts an invitation for several days on his friend's yacht.

Unhappy man! His wife, when she hears of it, is delighted. She understands that he and she are to go. "Oh, are *you* going?" she says to Mr. Gunning, the friend. "Well," he says haltingly, "it is my yacht." Gradually the awful

truth is drawn out by her. She is not to go. The men are going. Her husband reasons. He needs a change. Good heavens! Doesn't she need a change?

He gives up finally, sadly. Marriage begins to look like a gray and vulgar conflict to him. Then comes the last straw. His secretary is a woman. He had preferred a man, but his wife had insisted. Now this innocent, untutored country girl is a little in love with her master—not too much, just about enough, from your standpoint or mine, but not from the wife's. She sees her kiss the photograph of the said man. She discharges her. The typewriter refuses to go. She has the courage and the intelligence of an unspoiled mind, and she knows that to be a little in love with a good and strong man is not a crime. They appeal to the husband, refusing, both of them, to reveal the reason of the discharge. He is firm against his wife's caprice. His patience is gone, and he will not yield. The wife goes home with her father. The men have freedom now, and try to have fun. But difficulties arise. The cook wants to know whether she shall take her orders from her master or Miss Woodward, the secretary. The situation is impossible. It is adroitly solved by the friend's undertaking, at the prayer of the father-in-law, to get the secretary away. He falls a little bit in love with her,

and they are engaged. Contemporaneously a lull settles on the marital horizon.

The evils of marriage and the shallownesses of bachelorhood, the foibles of women and the foibles of men, are treated with an almost impartial understanding, and the hand of the artist is consistently true and light, except in a few spots, notably in a long speech at the end. It was a pleasure to see Mr. Drew in a play worthy of his talent, and her attractive work as the secretary immediately changed the professional standing of Miss Ida Conquest.

A prominent place in the theatrical events of recent years belongs to Henry Esmond's play, *When We Were Twenty-one*. Nothing is rarer in the English drama of to-day than true human comedy. Many of the ablest playwrights who are now writing comedy in English tend to the smart and artificial, and are seldom able to get away from the stage ring. This is not to say, of course, that the smart comedies are not delightful and valuable plays, but they stand inevitably below dramas which have the genuine something, the unanalyzable ability to present in a work of art the best, the most valued human feelings immediately, without the intervention of any visible technique. The methods of the masters of comedy are beyond dissection. You can talk all

day and in the best vein of cleverness about Thackeray at one end or Dickens at another, and never really put your hand on the secret. With a smart man, on the other hand, with men who have been giving us plays of the Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, R. C. Carton kind, it is a comparatively simple matter to name the tricks with which their results are reached. Leaving out of account revivals, of course, and also plays which owe so much to the genius of some dead master, there is nothing in English comedy which I have seen since *The Little Minister* was produced to equal in this spirit young Mr. Esmond's play. *The Tyranny of Tears* has enough essentially comic perception in it and enough dramatic skill to make it an intellectual pleasure, but *When We Were Twenty-one* surpasses Mr. Haddon Chambers's drama in dramatic skill and in inspiration. I went to see *The Little Minister* five times, and was struck with the truth that when there is any real art, any reproduction of the best flashes of human thought and feeling, familiarity does not lessen the charm. It confirmed my belief that this was the best English comedy of the last three seasons, and also that it would be an infinitely greater satisfaction to see it if Miss Maude Adams, with all her talent and hard work and artistic ambitions, were not the victim of the star system in its




worst form. To give such a comedy as this with one of the two central characters acted so feebly that it counts for nothing, and a large part of the play throughout taken in a crude and burlesque manner, quite opposed to the Barrie spirit, is of course the lamentable result of unappreciative management. *When We Were Twenty-one*, on the other hand, which is often as refined as Barrie's play, although less broad and varied, had the advantage of genuinely adequate interpretation. Nat Goodwin is a star and an actor-manager, but he is evidently an artist and a man of taste who does not produce plays because they have succeeded elsewhere; but because, whether the author is known or unknown, he has seen something in the play which he likes and believes in. In putting on this comedy, instead of arranging the cast to push him and his wife into the foreground, he selected the best players for the parts that could be found. The whole performance had the roundness, the evenness, of superior stock-company acting. Actor-management may have its faults, but it obviously is more catholic, original, and artistic than a system which subdues a large part of the whole dramatic field to one timid, conventional, and uninspired test. In selecting the plays for the year, a dozen or a score of heads are better than one, even if that one were excellent. A young dramatist of ability

who wishes without the help of a name which stands for conventional success to have his play produced in America, must really look, generally speaking, to the actor-manager, to players like Nat Goodwin, Mrs. Fiske, and Richard Mansfield.

The beauty, humor, and skill shown in *When We Were Twenty-one* illustrate one of the horrors of criticism, with which I have already linked this play in the opening chapter. Nobody has deceived me more than Henry Esmond. First in my experience came *One Summer's Day*, which I thought fine food for babes. Then I read *Grierson's Way*, and felt its power more than that of any other Ibsenesque play written in English. Then came *My Lady's Lord*, an attempt at a sort of Gilbertian burlesque, utterly without humor or any other inspiration, and I dilated on the strange contrast between the power of the author of *Grierson's Way* and the flatness of this new comedy, and drew the conclusion that Mr. Esmond's strength lay wholly along serious lines. Then came a play as good on high comedy lines as *Grierson's Way* was as an intense, intellectual drama, and superior to it in one important particular. *Grierson's Way* was reminiscent of Ibsen; *When We Were Twenty-One*, while owing some suggestions to Du Maurier and Thackeray, was essentially original, not with the originality of oddity or details which stick out, but with

that kind of directness and spontaneous reproduction of impressions which is the only kind of originality which counts for much in art. Although it is full of humor, it has little of the sharply pointed, artificial wit which would look well in short quotations. Indeed, the whole play is such a delicate compound that to tell the story and give extracts, which is an adequate method for the ordinary drama, is to incur the danger of doing injury to Mr. Esmond's comedy. The four middle-aged men of various ages, from forty to fifty, who are the central group in the story and create its atmosphere, are as freshly handled as if *Trilby* had never been written, and they say a large number of intensely amusing things, but these things are so closely connected with each other and with the whole that they cannot safely be wrenched out of their place and used as samples. They stand for what is kindest and softest and most generous in unmarried masculine middle life, and almost everything they say is full of the love of existence, of each other, and of all the interests that deserve the sympathy of good men. They know the world, and yet there is not a glint of cynicism in one of their speeches. They see a young man led astray by the sentimentality proper to his age, convinced that an actress who is pictured in flaming red to adorn the bill-boards is an angel of disinterested virtue; and instead of



inflicting any cheap superiority on him, they talk to him with the kindest talk, the most sympathetic understanding of his natural point of view, and even, in the case of one of the four, at least, with a faint suspicion that despite her known life the woman may be essentially what the boy thinks her. He, of course, young and full of vivid colors, sees no meaning in the mellow lights of maturity, and goes off in a fine, vivid glow to devote himself to his scarlet angel. The four friends, who have already shown their charity toward him when he was drunk and when he was insanely in love, do not, however, intend to let him take the encumbering step of marriage, especially as he has been engaged to a girl honored and loved by all of them. The device by which the attempt to prevent the marriage is made is the only theatrical part of the play — the only thing which reminds us, in a disappointing sense, that Mr. Esmond is an actor as well as a man of charming feeling, talent, and possible genius. The young man's guardian, one of the four friends, buys the name of the actress for a large sum of money for a month. He wishes nothing of her except that the world shall understand that she is his. This part of the play is worked out in the third act in a lively and elaborate supper club scene. The first two acts have been in a charming little domestic setting, unobtrusive and satis-

fyng. As the curtain rose on the second act, a man behind me, a member of the race which, with all its ability, certainly often loves meretricious ornament in art as it does in dress, exclaimed to his female companion: "It isn't very nice to look at the same line of goods all the time." With him in mind, no doubt, Mr. Esmond put in a third act which gives the cheap variety demanded by such persons. It has much that is touching, delicate, and true in it also, and it would be praised in an ordinary play, but it has too much that is out of the tone of this work to be justifiable here. Like the rescue scene which our most literary dramatist, Mr. Herne, put in *Shore Acres*, it may, no doubt, add to the popular success of the piece, but, nevertheless, it is a pity. The fourth act comes back again to the old setting and the old tone of virtuous and charming humanity. The boy is disillusioned and penitent. He is most attractive, most just, for the author has seen his state as one proper to twenty-one, treated it as sympathetically as he does that more experienced condition in which the four men, who remember so clearly the days when they were twenty-one, now find themselves. Even the actress turns her good side to the light in this act in a manner which, while striking and unexpected, is neither sentimental nor unconvincing. She sends back the cheque

which she has not earned, not for various reasons, such as the attitude of her present lover, which she names in order to keep her deed from seeming soft, but for the real reason that she wished the giver to understand that he was not the only fool in the world. In other words, this firefly had seen a good act done simply and without ostentation. She wished to do the same thing herself. Mr. Esmond knows actors and actresses, he is an optimist, and he was as true in giving the firefly this impulsive generosity as he was when he was painting the hard ease with which she turned from one man to another. The whole story is at once virile and tender, and shows only faint signs (as in dwelling affectionately on the title "the imp") of that lack of self-criticism which seems the greatest obstacle to the author's progress. If discrimination could keep Mr. Esmond always at his best, a high place would surely be won by him. That a man so young has written such a problem play as *Grierson's Way* and such a comedy as *When We Were Twenty-one*, to say nothing of one other drama, largely praised by good English critics, which I have not seen, puts him in a most interesting position.

Of course religious themes may make good drama, but the only one that has accomplished that feat of late was a notable failure. Israel

Zangwill dramatized his novel, *Children of the Ghetto*, which has sold well, and found that nobody would go to see it. This was a surprise to me, and was one of the many things to prevent faith in my own impressions, for I thought the play much more entertaining and salient than the book. Mr. Zangwill aroused critical hostility, because he was frank in advertising himself and attacking others, flippant and opposed in various ways, intellectual and business, to the controlling influences. There was much ridicule about calling it "the Zangwill play" in the advertisements. The connection between literature and advertising, since journalism and universal half-education have spread so widely, is one of the interesting subjects of the day. Mr. Zangwill's indulgence in it was attacked bitterly, merely on account of his personal unpopularity. The desire for fame has always been general. The difference is that lately the facilities for obtaining a large amount of it temporarily have widely increased. The manager who invented the habit of "presenting" famous actors to a public which might be supposed to know them, was moved by the same impulse. When "Charles Frohman presents" John Drew, William Gillette, John Hare, and Maude Adams, it is not because he imagines they need the introduction. It is because he, too, wishes to be famous. So when

he advertises "The Charles Frohman version of *The Only Way*." One of the pleasantest things in the world is to see one's name widely disseminated. The critics allow Mr. Frohman to work to this end, but he is tactful, whereas Mr. Zangwill with every opportunity fostered his unpopularity. Having attacked the managers, playwrights, actors, public, and critics indiscriminately, making no explicit exception beyond himself, he naturally incurred their hostility. These elements of human nature cannot be eliminated even from criticism. It is said that the dramatic editor of a morning paper was asked why he was so malignant in attacking a prominent actress. "Her husband has always treated me very badly in his paper," was the gallant reply.

Mr. Zangwill in public treated everybody badly. He repeated on the opening night his frequent assertion that literary men did not write for the stage in England and America as they do in other countries. He told the public that he was pleased by their desire to see him, and that he should be glad to have them call any time — and pay at the box office. He said that the management and acting were so perfect that if any critic found fault with the play, the fault was Zangwill's or the critic's. These things are amusing, but ordinary human nature stands so little!

Nevertheless, a deeper reason must be sought



for the failure of the play. Readers of the novel will remember how desultory and undramatic it was: a series of descriptions of what the author knew about the Jews, connected by a slight thread of story. The play had the same qualities, but mitigated. The story did not carry the scenes along, as is the nature of drama; but the scenes were so effective separately, so well put on by the stage-manager, so well acted that, with a plot which, though slight, was interesting, the pure dramatic interest was fairly sustained. The subsidiary interests of the stage were strong. The dialogue was exquisite; all the author's racy wit held in check by much more than his usual taste; his picturesque fancy set in its best medium; his keen intelligence turned upon a deeply interesting subject about which he has the knowledge of an expert.

“Behold, O friends, who stern in judgment sit,  
A hidden world the footlights ne’er have lit —  
A world whose day and night, whose sun and shade,  
By spinning round the ancient law are made;  
Whose springs and winters take, whate’er the clime,  
From old Jerusalem their changeless time,  
Still in God’s love the chosen people basks,  
But, ah, what tragic price Jehovah asks!  
How strange a miracle this deathless life!  
Ay, with itself and all the world at strife —  
This life that links us to the purple past  
Of Babylon and Egypt, all the vast  
Enchantment of the ancient Orient.

And yet with London and New York is blent  
The life that lives, though Greece and Rome are dust,  
And Spain's inquisitorial racks are rust,  
And, though so faded from the ancient glory,  
When kings and prophets shone in Israel's story,  
Is brightening once again, though who shall say  
With light of Eastern or of Western day?  
Our drama shows a phase transitional —  
Young love at war with ancient ritual.  
How dead laws living, loving hearts may fetter  
The contest of the Spirit and the Letter;  
Yet noble, too, that kissing of the rod,  
That stern obedience to the word of God,  
In godless days when sweated Hebrews scout  
The faith their sunless lives are dark without."

Such was the motive, in Mr. Zangwill's own words, as printed on a souvenir, with his own face for decoration. It is a fine motive, both spiritually and dramatically. Take two young Jews loving each other deeply, separated by stern conscience, merely because one has been the victim of a passing jest marriage and the other is descended from Aaron, and you have a plot worthy of dramatic genius. Mr. Zangwill is not a great dramatist, but he handled his noble theme well enough to lift the result far above the average level of our stage. Had his theatrical instinct matched his elevated theme and his literary instincts, this guiding motive and the many features, which now expressed it and now departed from it, would have had more

organization; but even without strong structure the play deserved success.

The broad humor of a life which most of us must take on trust was sketched with a free and able hand.

“ But do not deem the Ghetto is all gloom ;  
The Comic Spirit mocks the ages' doom  
And weaves athwart the woof of tragic drama,  
The humors of the human panorama.  
The poet vaunts, the hypocrite goes supple,  
The marriage broker mates the bashful couple ;  
The pedler cries his wares, the player aces,  
Saint jostles sinner, fun with wisdom paces ;  
The beggars prosper, and the babes increase,  
And over all the Sabbath whispers ‘ Peace ! ’ ”


In this panorama appeared several characters of striking originality. The young man and the young woman were nothing, as they usually are; but around them moved a hypocritical poet, new in literature, at least to me, distinct, delightful; a rabbi whose solemn loyalty was mingled with gentle gleams of humor on every absurdity before his eyes, a “ pauper alien,” who knew more than the rabbi, which pauper Jews often do, as even we Americans can learn at home; Esther, the girl grown old by responsibility — these were real creations, simple, sound, and the author's own, accompanied by a group of others almost as solidly conceived.

The failure of this play, compared to the success of *Ben-Hur* and *The Christian*, suggests that religious motives are good material for successful drama only when they are cheaply handled — used as seasoning for spectacle and melodrama.

A play by Mr. Zangwill, used by Mrs. Le Moyne, was little appreciated by the public, and brilliant from a literary point of view. It had the misfortune to be an afterpiece to *The Greatest Thing in the World*, a hopeless mass of mush, and therefore had little more chance of being seen by the right people than *Madame Butterfly*, a pretty Japanese play, had when it preceded a feeble-minded farce, or than *Ib and the Little Cristina*, a charming little story, had, coming before a tiresome French effort in the usual farcical line.

The name of Mr. Zangwill's drama is *The Moment of Death* or *The Never, Never Land*, and to this title is added an announcement equally disquieting: "The Time of this play is one moment. The Period covered is a quarter of a century. The Action takes about half an hour." The meaning of this is clear from the beginning of the second scene.

The Duchess of Maldon stands in the snow, outside her mansion in Belgravia. A servant holds an umbrella over her head, and the man of



God who has accompanied her urges her to go in out of the cold. She lingers, because she is so deeply interested in their chance discourse on sin, and in his praise of the dead duke's piety. He has even heard that he used to conduct services for the natives in Australia. He thinks temptation lies in congested cities. She asks if it may not double its power in the lonely country. He says that every good instinct in us comes from God. Does He, then, also cause the evil? No, the bishop thinks; that is ours.

The duchess totters at her door. Stammering, she says it is the cold. Another effort, and she falls upon the ground.

The stage is plunged in darkness. As the light breaks, we see a wild country in Queensland, called by the natives, "The Never, Never Land." A woman, of common race, talks to her aboriginal servitor. He leaves, and hoofs are heard approaching. There are two horses, and her lover rides alone, so she is frightened. She rushes into the hut, seizes a pistol, and bars the door. It is not violence, however; it is her lover, the stockman Robert. The second horse is for her. She struggles with her conscience, but finally consents to fly.

Then enters her husband, the gold-digger, an older man, whose pick, that day, has struck the metal which is to make them rich — of which he

longs to tell his wife. He sees her about to fly, and pulls his pistol. Her pleas are vain. She is safe, for he loves her; but the best the world holds for her lover is an equal chance — one dead shot against another.

That one may live to care for her, the husband demands a duel by lot. The wife must toss the button. If the husband lives, she can sew it on again.

The toss falls in favor of the lover. Ten paces are marked by the distracted woman, while her husband smokes his pipe. He is satisfied, and believes the hand of God is in it, for the memory of what his wife has done could not be a pleasant one.

The stockman shoots, carelessly, and with confidence.

A miss! It is the husband's turn now. The wife hurts him by showing for the lover a passionate terror not shown for her husband. He is inflexible. He offers the lover a chance to pray. He doesn't know how. To read the Bible then. The wife goes to get it, and in the meantime the gold-digger offers his rival a paper, to recount the news to his friends in hell. He reads on, carelessly enough, until he suddenly cries out with surprise and irony. Through deaths that have happened they are seeking him, a distant relative, to be the rich Duke of Maldon.

The woman brings the Bible. Holding one hand behind her, she pleads with her husband. Finding it hopeless, she kills him. Horrified at herself, she refuses to let her lover fly with a murderess. The entrance of the gold-digger's devoted servant leads to his death at the ranchman's hands, and the guilty couple rush away together.

The third scene is again before the mansion of the Duchess of Maldon. Recovering from her moment's dream upon the snow, she stammers that she is going to her husband, and dies.

It is all brilliantly written and it stands out distinct and almost terrible, like the dream it is. Rarely melodramatic, it is nevertheless pictorially and morally imaginative. It is a play which ought to have a future and it is the work of a true playwright, every one of the literary effects being made better by the stage.

In connection with Mr. Jones's *The Liars* some plays showing a similar tendency might naturally be considered. While *The Liars* was running, *Lord and Lady Algy*, by R. C. Carton, was put on by the Empire Theatre Stock Company. This play carries the observer back to the comedy of the Restoration. There is an easily discernible drift just now in a number of dramatists toward the drama of epigram,—immoral, showy, highly civilized, unreal,—the expression

of a society which is cynically toying with emotion and wearily amusing itself. Prominent in the group are the plays of Oscar Wilde, in whose dramas there is only part of the time seen the moral vision inseparable from depth. In *The Liars* even the good Mr. Jones partly enters these lists, and Mr. Carton in *Lord and Lady Algy* proves an ability in this game of playing with mind and taste not clearly inferior to any living English playwright except the author of *You Never Can Tell*. Mr. Gilbert and Mr. Pinero are not included in the comparison, because their comedy, of a softer tone, more subtle and more significant, lies quite outside of this modern Congreve spirit. Our dramatists are not unlikely to do something notable in this vein, for it does reflect part of our life. It is probably less surely founded in the national spirit than such plays as Mr. Pinero's late comedies, but it is nearer home reality than anything modelled on the intellectual life of Norway or Italy.

*Lord and Lady Algy* is far from subtle or profound, but it is assuredly smart and inspiring, far superior to the *Tree of Knowledge*, which preceded it. It is superficial, but the surface is amusing. Neat, compact, progressive in construction, it is sharp and tart in dialogue and clear and dramatic in its situations. The author knows his business — an excellent thing for an



author to know. If it belongs to the brassy type of comedy, it is good after its kind, which is all we need to ask. There is no character creation, and none is needed. The only jars are, perhaps, due to its British origin. We Americans do not understand how persons worth considering can have all their thoughts concentrated on horses, or make such a fuss, even in fun, over cigarettes and drinks. Women smoke or they don't, which seems to end the matter. This foreign stress on things which seem to be deemed half sinful and wholly smart doesn't need to be condemned, for it is always intelligent to give the unknown the benefit of the doubt. Only fools are so terribly horsy in America, but America is not the world.

The first act maps out the situation quickly, and starts the plot in motion. Lord Algy and his wife are separated, in a cool and sporty way, and one Tudway and his wife disagree, because he is impetuous and "she is romantic. I believe the correct word is disillusioned." Lord Algy's brother, the Marquis (there are titles galore), is urging Mrs. Tudway to elope. He can't use the National Gallery for his wooing. It is open only from ten to six. So he borrows his brother's apartment. That brother is much bored with his lonely life, spiced by "a few palls who laugh at everything unless it happens to be funny." His separated wife makes a call on her husband

and gets into the current of the plot. Her opinion of the elopement is concise. "The old-enough-to-know-better time of life is not easy to fix." Mrs. Tudway also appears on the scene and manages to say, among other things, in discussing the effect of the contemplated elopement, that "society always hopes the worst."

Act II is one of the most amusing things recently seen. The various couples, with their intrigues, are brought together at a fancy-dress ball, given by Mrs. Tudway. Lord Algy, knowing her by sight only, not by name, goes there, in behalf of Tudway, to dissuade her from the elopement. He is very full, however, and Tudway suspects him of being the lover, so he doesn't lack trouble. Tudway has told the host that a certain man was to come "in the guise of a serpent," and the host assures him that he will not be admitted, not being in the period. Algy gets in, however, and wandering through the throng finds everybody else either what he deems unsociable or what appears to his vision drunk. He asks always for Mrs. Tudway. "Won't you help me spot her out?" When he sees her, he knows not who she is and calls her a "hazy dream," a phrase given by herself and persistently used as a name by him to her, her husband, and others. The costume of the party is eighteenth century, and an old fright of a mother is "after Reynolds."

That amuses Algy intensely, and he starts off to find Reynolds. One of the innocent remarks of these scenes is made to Mrs. Tudway, "The ties that bind you are loosening," the ambiguity of which frightens her.

With Algy to the ball comes his faithful jockey, dressed as Prince Charley. "You are the Young Pretender," says Algy. "You have nothing to do but pretend. I am the Duke of Wellington. I have a reputation to hold up." He has held it up as well as he could in dress. "Don't tell me these damned uncomfortable boots are not in the period!" He is sure he knows what he is about. "I have not had too much liquor. I have not had enough. Simple proof is, I'm thirsty now."

In his drunken way he finally delivers the warning to the wife and goes home gallantly escorted by his good-humored wife, having made an appointment for the eloping pair, which he wholly forgets in the sober morning. He knows he has been drunk. "I was trying to be in the period." A fairly comical valet serves as the only perfunctory person of the play. "Cook has purchased a copy of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which she reads aloud evenings, and taken with underdone veal it is very trying." The guilty Mrs. Tudway soon appears, to Algy's surprise, who finally guesses the truth and gives her a scr-

mon in true worldly form, saying his brother will prove a bigger bore than her husband.

"Yet I believe he has given me his heart."

"Yes, but do not forget this. You must take his liver as well."

His arguments are effective, and the reconciliation of Tudway and his wife is brought about at the same time that Lord and Lady Algy also decide to live together, this being accomplished in a way much less obvious than might be expected. In the second act of this play William Faversham scored his greatest success.

Mr. Carton followed *Lord and Lady Algy*, which had a great vogue, with *Wheels within Wheels*, which did only fairly, though it had more of the quality which Yvette Guilbert demurely calls "shocking."

As the play opens, a fashionable woman, Mrs. Bulmer, enters the bachelor apartment of Mr. Vartrey and commits burglary on a cabinet, whence she extracts a letter. While she is in the act the temporary occupant of the rooms, Lord Eric Chantrell, steps in. He exhibits no surprise. She shows no dismay. Being of that type of woman who exists in our fond imaginings to-day as the eloquently moral and tearful heroine existed in the hearts of some of our ancestors, and nowhere else, she calmly calls her act burglary,

and endeavors to ascertain the stranger's intentions. After very little argument, to the effect that the letter compromises a woman, Lord Eric burns it for his unknown visitor. He does it without words, calmly, silently, for he also belongs to this imagined world, which expresses what some smart people wish they were.

"Do you happen," says Lord Eric, "to know where they keep the coal?" That is the wit of the piece, at its best. It is so mild a comment on the knowledge the lady has shown of the bachelor apartment that nobody laughs. Describing what he has been doing before he returned to England, and how globe-trodden the world is, he says, with no emphasis, that you cannot shoot lions in Africa now without a game license.

Enter James Blagden, a noisy, honest, good-humored, and dissipated poltroon. Mrs. Bulmer, who is still unknown to Lord Eric, is put behind a curtain. Blagden begins to tell indecent stories, especially one about "two Englishwomen in bathing at Dieppe." Lord Eric prevents this, but cannot prevent Blagden's account of his engagement to the rich Mrs. Bulmer and of his present fairly satisfactory existence with a less regular female. After he has gone, the lady emerges, and, far from being displeased, says she blames Lord Eric for one thing only. "I *should*

have liked to hear that story about the two ladies at Dieppe."

The first curtain is exquisite. Lord Eric is smitten with his anonymous friend. She shows him a latch-key to the apartment. "I let myself in with a key. You are a man of the world, and will give to that fact its full significance. Turn that latch-key over in your mind. Good night, Lord Eric."

This act is stunningly good—much the best of the three. The rest of the play lets down, but I must give one quotation, "Although I may be running my head into a brick wall," she remarks, "after all it is my head, and the wall is free to everybody."

Criticism of thoroughly bad art is usually futile, but great popular success lends a certain justification to protest. Therefore, of a certain Monday in New York I shall speak at some length, since it is connected with the Philistine in all his might. This particular evening saw two conspicuous theatrical events. One was a great play, one of the richest comedies in the English language, with a strong cast, headed by a man who has taken a permanent place high in the annals of the American stage. The other was an awkward dramatization of one of the most stupid novels of recent times. The attention of

the theatre-going public was centred on Hall Caine and Viola Allen, not on *The Rivals* and Joseph Jefferson.

A house, packed as first-night houses in New York now are, by friends of the star, could not screw up energy to carry out its bargain and force enthusiasm. Yet Mr. Caine surprised everybody by appearing before the curtain. One man yelled "Speech!" Hall Caine made one.

It was like the famous author. He complimented the audience, the actors, and Sir Henry Irving. Then he made his subtlest hit. He lugged in the *entente*. He had type-written copies of his opinion on the *entente* before he got here. He said:—

"For myself, as a guest and a stranger, I have only a word to say. At a moment when so much is being said on both sides of the Atlantic of the era of good feeling between our United Kingdom and the United States, it will, I think, be gratifying to my fellow-countrymen to hear that in the domain of art, as well as in politics, you receive an Englishman in New York with as much warmth of brotherly feeling as if he had been born and bred among yourselves."

Mr. Caine is serious, and he attends to business. As his own press agent he knows his trade. He cannot write novels or plays which do not give any intelligent man the heartache, but

he knows the public, and knows when to drag in the *entente*.

The difference between the play and the novel is that the drama spent an hour or so in narration, by Storm and Glory, of all the things that happened between the acts. The play was inferior to the novel in every respect but one: it was shorter. How the wit of Hall Caine pleaded for laughter and begged for mercy on the stage! How his sentiment resembled a blind beggar! How his "ideas" laboriously got themselves born in speeches! Oh, it was a bad play. The trade of novel-writing has been learned by Mr. Caine up to his limit, while in the drama he is a beginner. In the art of being stupid, as in other things, I personally prefer the expert to the novice, and so—if I had to do either—would rather read *The Christian* again, with such reasonable skipping as might be necessary to preserve my sanity, than to sit through it at the theatre.

Yet after the first-night frost and severe criticism from practically all the papers, *The Christian* became one of the successes of the decade,—"One touch of indecency makes the whole world grin;" and cloaking a sex interest in piety doubtless helped draw the suburban population who made the greater part of the audience.






## CHAPTER XVI

### FROM THE FRENCH

WE all remember the man who studied French, that he might read the English drama in the original. The fact, strong as it is, is easily overstated, especially from a cause that has nothing to do with real influence. *Because She Loved Him* So is called "William Gillette's comedy," when it is not; but none the less Mr. Gillette's own plays are thoroughly original in inspiration and workmanship. *Zaza* is billed as "David Belasco's great play," just as translations from the German are called comedies "by Sydney Rosenfeld," and as the late Charles Coghlan claimed the authorship of the *Royal Box*, a literal translation of Dumas's *Kean*, or as Paul Potter got himself into trouble with Sardou (Maupassant being dead) over *The Conquerors*. False claims are different things from influences, and Mr. Herne and Mr. Gillette in this country, Mr. Pinero, Mr. Jones, Mr. Shaw, and Mr. Esmond in England, have in their best work been as lacking in echoes from France as any authors need to be. What we take directly from the French is among the



best and the worst of our yearly theatrical exhibit. French farces have recently been more conspicuous because Mr. Charles Frohman happened to believe in them, but they have had so many failures of late that the end of their excess seems near. Edmond de Goncourt quotes an actress whom he once heard say, "Le théâtre au fond, mes enfants, c'est l'absinthe du mauvais lieu." France sends us more to justify that assertion than any other country, but she has also sent us some of the best product of recent years, in the two last plays of Edmond Rostand.

Such an enormous success was made by *Zaza* that it deserves to be chronicled, merely to keep on the list of cases of popular insanity. Newspaper critics said that Mrs. Leslie Carter, in the title part, combined the best qualities of Bernhardt and Réjane.

It is doubtful whether there was ever a more enthusiastic reception to a play and actress than the one received by Mrs. Carter and *Zaza* in New York.


David Belasco made a speech. He reminded the audience, with tears in his larynx, that nine years ago a most unhappy woman flung herself at his feet and asked his "advice." She got it. Mr. Belasco then said, "There is one perfectly happy woman in the world to-night." That

woman had reached the goal of every actor's ambition (while in New York), the approval of a New York audience. "She will, before she *retires*, send a telegram to a certain red-headed boy, telling him that you like her, and he will then know that he has no reason to be ashamed of his mother."

Bravo, Mr. Belasco. Did not every woman's heart in that vast throng thrill?

The play is well manufactured on familiar lines; the first act presents a popular feat of stage-management, and Mrs. Leslie Carter is a vigorous person, with undoubted power, trained into theatrical effectiveness, but into no sort of distinction or fineness. Her acting is not one of those works of art in which a soul can be discerned, and therefore able as it is it calls for no special enthusiasm.

The dramatization of *Sapho* which Réjane has made familiar, and in which Daudet was a collaborator, is bad enough, but the plays on that novel which flooded America in 1899-1900 ranged from coarseness to absurdity. Olga Nethersole started it in a version made by Clyde Fitch. The newspapers attacked her, one of them dragged her to court, she was acquitted, and the result was Saphos all over the country. Not only did cheap English-speaking companies play it all over the



nation, but there were given in New York two versions in Yiddish and one in Japanese. The Yiddish kept in the main to the spirit of the original. The Japanese was notable for the lovable and moving acting of Sada Yacco. The composition was offhand. The head of a visiting troupe, Otojiro Kawakami, went into Wallack's one day to see Miss Nethersole, and then had the book, or a synopsis of it, translated for him, whereupon he knocked off two short acts, the first comic, the second serious. The first took place out-of-doors in Déchoulette's garden, during a fancy-dress entertainment. One man was dressed like a cardinal, another wore a fool's cap, and so on. First Sada Yacco, as Fanny Legrand, executed one of her dances, so exquisite that, although it represented cheerfulness, it had the effect of pathos. Then some one else gave a rough comedy dance. Déchoulette's guests hilariously applauded. Games were played, somersaults turned, and finally blindman's buff cleared the stage, so that Fanny and Jean could do their love-making. In this the spirit of the novel was followed, and not Mr. Fitch's play. Fanny took possession of the young man almost by main force. She pretended to be terribly ill, frightened him, made him rub her chest and heart, and clung to his hand when he would escape. He yielded, laid his cheek on hers, and the entering guests dis-



covered them and made sport of them. Various games extended the ingenuous comedy of the act.

In the second Jean and Fanny were living together. His peace was first broken by a letter which he found after he had been mollified by her arts. Déchoulette entered to tell him about Fanny's past — that she was the original of the painting of Sapho on his mantel. In his wild rage he tore the painting to bits. Again Fanny (Sahoko was her Japanese name) was able finally to calm him, but during his absence the deserted Flamant entered, with their baby, and eloquently worked on Sapho's heart. She was moved, Jean returned, discovered the resemblance between mother and child, and raised a hurricane again. Incidentally he kicked the infant viciously. He went off, and Fanny arranged to devote herself to Flamant and the baby. Jean relented and returned, Fanny gave him wine, put him to sleep, wrote her farewell, and stole off with the child. Nobody laughed at Sada Yacco. Her ways of showing all the emotions were as clear to Americans as our own. The rather crude audience roared at Kawakami, in the rôle of Jean, as if he had been a clown; but the little Japanese Fanny with every touch reached the Western heart. Kawakami showed almost any excitement, whether rage, fear, or scorn, for instance, by dashing his hands across his mustache and

half blowing and half snorting, and he fell down, with the ease, brevity, and rapidity of a circus athlete, to show perturbation. The audience, naturally enough, had its mind diverted by differences in convention which had nothing to do with the essentials of drama. It was moved with inextinguishable laughter by the fact that a squeaking behind the scenes was supposed to represent the crying of an infant on the stage — of course an extraneous and wholly unimportant matter. Differences in dramatic conventions may represent higher and lower development of an art, where the conventions deal with the expression of thought and feeling; but these purely mechanical differences, like the question of scenery, are of no possible significance. The side of Japanese acting which appeals to the eye—the gestures, groupings, spaces, etc.—does not come out as noticeably in these hasty sketches founded on foreign dramas as it does in the native plays.


The version of *Sapho* which made all the excitement was a fairly good play, acted with distinguished power by Olga Nethersole, and less badly performed by the others than is usual in her company. In decency it was about on a level with that other sensation, *Zaza*, which it also resembled in the false sentimentality injected by the American adapter into the caustic logic of the French. There was nothing like the Carmen kisses. The



moral tone was more like that of *La Dame aux Camélias*.

It was called "a play by Clyde Fitch, founded on Daudet's story, with scenes taken from the play by Daudet and Belot." This inaccurate description was in line with the general tendency to call all adaptations originals. After the first act the play was distinctly an adaptation of the French play, with no fundamental changes of structure, though with a number of minor modifications, some suggested by the novel, but most of them independent of the French story. Mr. Fitch's adaptation improved the French play theatrically, on the whole, though in a literary sense it is inferior to it; while to compare it with the novel would be to contrast an ordinary, insincere, made-to-order piece of work, adequate for its purpose, with a masterpiece of finesse, experience, taste, and sincerity.

The first act was a spectacle suggested by the first scene in the novel, and it was splendidly handled, taken as a spectacle, and showed throughout the very skilful hand of Mr. Fitch in the costumings, groupings, and picturesque episodes. Of course, Daudet was a thousand miles away. Instead of an introduction to the deep, quiet, warning notes of approaching destruction, as in Daudet, this scene in Mr. Fitch's handling was pushed to the front, so that it killed what signifi-



cant dialogue between the artists was introduced from a later part of the book, or invented. Also, instead of Fanny's quiet, feline grasp of the innocent youth, when she herself was turning the hill to age, and almost neglected, we saw her entering to music, the queen of everything in sight, a right royal star actress. Worse even than that: instead of her taking possession of Jean against his will by the insistence of old and practised passion; we saw the country boy falling in love with her, while she, the virtuous Fanny, warned him to keep away, for his sake, again illustrating the eternal actor nature. To match this goodness, other virtues were introduced, and poor Flamant was brought in, so that Fanny could show how magnanimous and superior she was in that connection also. Everybody else was lowered and vulgarized. Déchoulette, the distinguished, original, and kindly epicure, was made into something little short of a beast. Uncle César was there, too, no longer a piece of half-savage, half-amusing satire, but just a stage comedian. It was an amusing scene, but it showed ahead that the austere theme of Daudet was to be lost, however closely his incidents might be taken.

The second scene of the first act gave the famous staircase episode—but how changed! In Daudet it is a noble symbol, the picture of a youth forced to take a burden that excites him at first




and then weighs him down, more and more heavily — a picture that in Daudet's hands is so stern and true that he dedicates the book to his own sons when they shall be twenty years old, and at the parting of the ways. In the American version, what was it? The young man wished to carry Fanny upstairs to her room. She warned him; she was so good. He insisted. He did it, and that was all. It was simply picking her up and taking her to her room.

The second act began on Daudet's play, with many changes to soak the star in sympathy. Instead of having the proofs of her past forced out of her by the enraged Jean, she voluntarily travelled off to get them, as a sign of her love for him.

In the third act the son of Fanny and Joseph played a much larger part than in the French, and enabled Sapho to show what an A 1 conscience she had; and how, when cast off, she could yet turn to the child. It was after the wild pleading and despair of a scene with the child that Miss Nethersole received her greatest applause, and deserved it, for it was abandoned passion and despair done to the life, with a richness and justness that few actresses anywhere could equal.

The last act showed Jean's return after his abandonment. His suspicion that Flamant had



spent the night was unjust, in this version, of course. Sapho left in the same way she does in the original, only with a lot more talk about marriage and the duties of parents. Jean was a rough chump throughout. The original story is told from his point of view. On his fate the narrative progresses. His place is like Othello's, hers like Iago's, — technically, of course, not as characters: he the victim, changing, developing; she the stationary, destructive force. We see how a warm-hearted, thoroughgoing slave of passion wrecks and empties the life of a healthy and happy boy by loving him; and this moral is told with sympathy for her as well as for him, but with inexorable understanding that his interests are those of humanity; while hers, whosoever is to blame for it, are against the common good. In place of this wholesome theme, painfully, delicately, and honestly worked out, this version gave us the old weak story of a woman, singularly, ideally noble, like most stage courtesans, suffering through the cruelty of man. The body of the story was about the same — the soul infinitely lowered.

After all, there is but one great drama on the subject of soiled doves, and in that we have lately seen two performances, — one very great but not new, the other new and mistaken. *La Dame aux Camélias*, as played by Olga Nethersole's company, was properly announced as "adapted."

Everything that could reasonably be expected to ruin a brilliant stage play was done by the anonymous traducer, ably seconded by the walking-sticks with whom Miss Nethersole sees fit to surround herself. Any well-wisher might have advised her to get a straight translation of the play, instead of a mixture of mawkish interpolations and imbecile omissions.


Her own impersonation was strong in certain places, which fit what she likes to do and can do best; for instance, when she wept after the sacrifice demanded by old Duval, and elsewhere — but the keynote of Marguerite Gautier's character, a sad purity in the midst of coarse vice, she not only failed to give, but made her interpretation such that Marguerite seemed to set the pace for her fellow-women. With Mrs. Tanqueray made coarse, the play was all right, and Miss Nethersole was admirable in the part. With Marguerite rendered vulgar and lascivious, Dumas's impossible but effective dream lost the very soul of its existence, and signified nothing spiritually, and little theatrically, since the dramatic interest is wholly fused with the situation and the character and their assumed truth. Miss Nethersole showed off her Carmen kisses, and anybody who can see objectively will admit that she is powerful along certain lines, of which sensual intensity is one, but this is a poor play to show them in. Bern-

hardt, as usual, when she plays the younger Dumas, is in perfect sympathy with the part. During her last American trip she acted Marguerite so as to prove that it is one of the most beautiful and moving performances in her repertoire, and M. Coquelin again gave his perfectly finished and sympathetic study of the elder Duval. Dumas's early drama is not Olympian, but it was struck out by a young and ardent mind at a heat, with conviction and enthusiasm, when the youth's full-born dramatic skill was carried forward by emotional belief in his subject. Therefore it lives every year, in different countries and many tongues, and one actress after another takes her turn at Marguerite, created and vital as she is, however impossible she may be. Give Sarah Bernhardt the right chance, and her imagination will illuminate what she touches. Dumas here gives her enough kindness, generosity, new love, knowledge of approaching death, self-sacrifice, struggling hope, and the end, — all important and all theatrically expressed, — and in these ample regions Bernhardt moves and reigns by divine right. Time has made the earlier scenes less of an illusion to the eye, although they are treated in every detail with matchless art; but in the last act every effort, every need of skill, is forgotten, and the actress plays with such complete ownership of her theme



and her audience that love and death seem to stand there before us, terrible and beautiful, with the reality of life made fairer by the colors in which it is wrapped. It would be little to say that, although I had seen the drama time after time, Madame Bernhardt made it live again. She seemed to give to the end meanings which it never had before; and doubtless if I should see her a dozen times in succession there would be new revelations at each performance. In the earlier parts they would be revelations of understanding and skill, made by her unapproachable variety and certainty of execution; but in this last act they would be the new lights that always come from sheer greatness in art, however familiar. It is a happy thing that Madame Bernhardt can, by the slightest movement of her body, or by a shade on her graphic face, speak so deeply about life as it is conceived in the early acts of *La Dame aux Camélias*; but it is an infinitely more important and wonderful thing that she can, in the climax of the whole, make us, for so long a time, look one awful truth in the face, as if we saw it intimately for the first time. To give this freshness and importance to the few leading facts of our existence, of which love and death are first, is the highest accomplishment of the inspired artist.

Bernhardt, whose mind seldom rests, has shaded




her performance. Marguerite at first has less hope, less spirit, and more clear-sighted and resigned despair than she used to have. The questioning *éternel?* which used to ring in golden tones from orchestra to gallery as the dreaming soul of her ideal, now has a lighter, sadder, more disillusioned meaning, and only in moments through the whole play does hope struggle out from this overhanging vision of the end. The thousand little silent speeches, made by her body, hands, and eyes, also point to the castles of love, built in dreams, less than they did, and more to the deadly knowledge that dogs her life. Perhaps the result is a deeper and more abiding truth, farther from ordinary drama, and more fully tragic.

As the elder Duval, M. Coquelin showed again the respectable old man, good, honest, severe, but easily moved, the very essence of family virtue and simple gentility; and the actor drew this quiet character with the simple outlines of a master. The others were sufficient in ability, and they naturally fade into oblivion, while what remains is the tenderness and depth of the great tragedian.

*La Tosca*, on the other hand, seemed to me as disgusting as it ever did in its ignoble history. Not all the acting in the world could do anything to redeem it. Sardou, at his best, has certain qualities which it is possible to praise. Sardou, at his worst, is one of the most unpleasant arti-



sans who ever wasted the lower forms of technical skill, and *La Tosca* is Sardou at his deadeast. In acting, as in other arts, universal rules are false, but it is a rather safe generalization that a good actor will not do his best in a stupid drama, and the better his natural gifts the greater will be the difference between his work in good plays and in bad ones. Bernhardt's superlative technical mastery of her business showed in a hundred details, as it did also in the big scenes, but what good does it do? The value of skill and strength depends upon their use, and the mere difficulty of an accomplishment lends it no worth. Moreover, Bernhardt not only used her powers on dead material, but she used them only part of the time. In the comparatively small part of Roxane, as in the big part of Reichstadt, she was real and powerful from the beginning to the end. As the heroine of Sardou's nightmare, she pulled herself together, with her old-time fury, and gave some spectacular exhibitions of tigress despair and rage, which nobody else could equal; but these volcanic spasms were offset by some positively inadequate acting. Jealousy, for instance, is called for as the principal emotion in several scenes, and Bernhardt played it with a suggestion of opera bouffe, quite without conviction. Even at those parts for which the play exists—such dainty bits as the scene where tortures are applied



to her lover while she hears and sees his agony — the immense energy of her acting seemed little more than vehemence and professional competence: unmistakably great on technical grounds, unmistakably worthless if submitted to those tests of identification with the subject, of meaning and beauty, by which is tested any art, be it poetry, sculpture, painting, or even acting.

Coquelin's performance, equally lacking in ideal value by the necessity of his rôle, also wholly lacked Bernhardt's masterly execution. Of so accomplished an actor it may be discourteous to say curtly that he couldn't play Scarpia, but it would come near the truth. Apart from the fact that on the first night he did not know his lines, and therefore checked the effect of some of the most theatrical scenes, he never came within sight of the character. Cruelty, treachery, and lust were never touched, and at his worst he seemed almost amiable. He worked hard to give the right impression, — as hard as his memory would let him, — but it was no use, and his attack on Flora in the fourth act caused a number of spectators to smile cheerfully.


*Robespierre*, our newest infliction from Sardou, gained its importance from the actors. It was a piece of regally attired mediocrity. Filled to the





brim with good acting, brilliant management, dexterous dramatic carpentry, the real soul of it was small and comparatively cheap. For this nobody is to blame. Sir Henry Irving has worked long and nobly for the stage. For many, many years he has fought his way along the hazardous passes of public taste, wishing to uplift and not to comply; and by his side Miss Terry has poured into many of the fairest creations of the world's literature all her sweetness, grace, and impetuosity. Therefore, it was right that their reception in America should be an ovation; that the first appearance of Miss Terry should inspire a burst of affectionate greeting, and that Sir Henry's elevated acting should have its unstinted reward. We need not ask the impossible. Money must be made that it may be spent, and while *Robespierre* was strengthening Sir Henry's pecuniary position, he was still giving us *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Bells*, *Nance Oldfield*, and *Waterloo*.

Sardou's latest effort was marked by his usual ability to do with extreme precision a number of things not too well worth doing. He combined a few tested and successful dramatic episodes with a few generously spectacular scenes, all put together with such a knowledge of the insides of Brown, Smith, and Robinson that the mess of pottage was surely won. It was the stage, not



in the sense in which the stage is the material of a beautiful and enlightening art, the mirror of the depths, beauties, and tragedies of life, but in the sense in which it is the equal of other useful and unideal machinery. The playwright chose a great subject, capable of being treated as a tragedy, but he has in himself the soul not of a tragedian, but of an artisan.

The dead were not brought to life, but this dramatic corpse came as near being warmed into vital existence by the actors and the stage manager as could be expected. Sir Henry's performance had genuine greatness, the general level of the acting was good, the crowds were big, vivid, and multiform; and Miss Terry, in a conventional part, yet acted with those movements, all her own, — quick, lovely, and poetic, — which form so great a part of the charm that lingers so hauntingly in the memory of all our generation, fragrant as the creations which she has interpreted. Sir Henry's best work in the big scenes was in his attitudes, and none of his powers is more unique than his plastic ability, the instinctive certainty with which every movement throws his body into a new position of dramatic effectiveness. In acting for the eye he has few equals.

Although our plays from the French are so numerous, it would hardly pay to linger over most



of them, and I shall speak of but one other French contribution. One of the best casts ever seen in New York made a popular success out of a French play from which little was expected, even by those who produced it.

No play of the year 1898-99, except *Cyrano de Bergerac*, aroused such intelligent discussion — a term which is not intended to embrace columns of rambling over the virtue of Glory Quayle. *Cyrano de Bergerac* penetrated even to Third Avenue, and *Catherine*, though it appealed mainly to the trained artistic taste, became a subject to talk about. That is what the theatre ought to be. The more the plays which arouse comment on questions of art, and not of morality or meaning, the sooner the day when, for an intelligent man, an evening at the theatre will be an evening to the good.

*Catherine* was conventional and what we Americans fairly call artificial and insincere; but to a Frenchman there is nothing shallow or untrue in coolly choosing a pretty and commonplace theme and writing graceful and cultivated prose about it. The play is said to have been written by Lavedan, who had just succeeded with an improper comedy, to show by a Comédie Française success his title to the seat of Meilhac. He was virtuous and decorous by calculation. As one nation does not understand the idiosyncrasies

of another, but only the universal traits, we call this Gallic taste for neat and finished expression in conventional forms by harsh names; but one may love it whose heart is equal to any emergency.


If *Catherine* were badly written, it would be a chromo. Being the work of a man of literary refinement, it was a pleasing repast for the æsthetic sense.

The translation was crude and heavy. The acting was what turned it into a popular triumph, in spite of the foreign elements and the luckless traducers. It made many people think what a resource, what a comfort and inspiration, the theatre ought to be, and what it may yet be in New York. There is something so satisfying and full in the work of a cast which is composed of artists from top to bottom, that not even the flame of sporadic genius gives just that pleasure.

Annie Russell, in the title rôle, for two acts showed at her best for poetry, comedy, and trained artistic means. As she stood up and told her lover what weeks and months and years of labor at the piano mean, as her eyes shone and then softened with her feeling for the dear old truths, she was an actress who could give us certain shades of poetry with extreme delicacy. When her mother's memory was appealed to, and tears came and quickly went; when she told in tones of sweetness how far below our dreams reality falls, either for sorrow or happiness; when she watched



the children play, and her eyes reflected absurdity and tenderness, she was doing the high-class work of which she is capable. In the last two acts, where a more tense and hard tone were called for, she was not so good. Mrs. Le Moyne's Duchess made her famous, and led immediately to her becoming a star. She played sometimes in too low a key, seeming to be struggling for the subdued, as did Miss Russell and most of the company — a point of view which did injustice to the play and seemed like a tribute to unnatural "naturalism" and repression. But Mrs. Le Moyne got over that before long and gave an exhibition of acting in which strength, dignity, sweetness, subtlety, all stood on equal terms. To hear her deliver, "Suppose we say no more of flattery and honor, and speak of happiness instead," was to hear the voice do some of its finest work. To hear her tell about the misery of Paris was to listen to speech so clear and firm and full of shading and emotion, that the like rarely falls to the lot of even the habitual theatre-goer. Elsie De Wolfe, Joseph Holland, Frank Worthing, May Buckley, and a few others made up one of the most notable casts of New York theatrical history.



## CHAPTER XVII

### HISTRIONIC AND LITERARY SIDE-SHOWS

VARIETY on the contemporary American stage is so small, that benefits, special matinées, acting-school exhibitions, and fleeting independent theatre experiments are often used as opportunities by actors anxious to appear in lines for which the regular stage offers no opportunity. Not only have these special performances shown me many of the best plays I have seen, but they have thrown floods of light on qualities in various actors which but for them might have been beyond discovery.


A few details will illustrate the advantages, for the student of the drama, in following these occasional opportunities.

David Bispham now stands in my mind as possibly a notable actor if he ever chooses to abandon the opera. Of course too much cannot be judged from one part, but he played Beethoven in a little piece called *Adelaide* at the Lyceum Theatre in the spring of 1898 so powerfully that it remains in my memory as one of those flashes

of art that show us new truths or help us back to truths which we have forgot.

A genius is to be put upon the stage — one of those men whose meaning for the world is in their minds, in their artistic visions, not in their deeds or spoken words. What can the actor do? He cannot make a picture of what Dante or Milton saw, and if he gives only their outside, he vulgarizes them and jars those who love them. Remembering what centres in the name of Beethoven, and the paltry circumstances of his actual life, one realizes what imagination and power it took for Mr. Bispham to give this great figure, not only so as to lose none of its ideal atmosphere, but so that many to whom Beethoven meant much saw his mind and genius with more vivid fulness. Victor Maurel seemed to me a wonderful Falstaff, a great actor—as Calvé seems in *Carmen*; but the conditions of the operatic stage are different, and Mr. Bispham is the only singer I ever saw do such acting on the regular stage.

The play of *Adelaide* is a simple one, sincere and straightforward, relying on the intellectual situation entirely. At the opening, Beethoven's landlady and his washerwoman are talking about the composer. The revelation of his deafness is prepared for by their talk about his recent suspicion and harshness, compared with his former geniality. He comes in singing his latest com-



position. The coarse women rail at him. He is deaf, and goes on with his singing, talking about his hope to join the idea and the music in a perfect harmony. They keep yelping at him. Finally, after some half-grewsome comedy, which shows how he suspects all the world and jealously guards his bitter secret, he drives them away in rage. His landlady's daughter enters, the only person who shares his secret. In confessing her love for a young musician, while he reads her lips, she says that he will not understand, for he has never loved. With a mocking laugh, Beethoven breaks out into a storm of contempt for love, that hot wind which passes over the meadows, searing the blossoms and leaving only the charred stems, of which he is one. Then he softens. Sweetness takes him as suddenly as irony had taken him. He tells the little girl about the lady Adelaide, whom he loved and lost twenty years before.

He leaves the room; the lover of the girl comes with the new song, "Adelaide," copied for Beethoven, and sings it to his sweetheart. As he sings, a beautiful woman, veiled, appears at the door and listens. She asks to see the musician, and will take no refusal. He enters, grumbling that she is spoiling the precious hours of creation. He does not look at her, but angrily asks if she wants an autograph, a sonata, or a lock of his



hair, and tells her to write the answer. She speaks, and thinks he has forgotten the sound of her voice. She stretches out her arms and asks if he has forgotten her. As he turns accidentally, he starts and cries "Adelaide!" How she has loved him through all the years is told, and how she is free at last to marry him; but Beethoven hears nothing. She thinks he has ceased to love her, and starts to go, when he drags her back and tells the secret that he is guarding from the ignorant and flippant world. As his indignant passion rises, his thoughts run from his love to his music, from his music to his love, back and forth, in the world where both are ideals. It would be madness to see her, to know that she was speaking words of love that he could never hear — and he sends her away, sinking alone into his chair, where the little Clärchen joins him, his only friend. To play with a man who was giving such magnificent feelings their full power and beauty, as Mr. Bispham did, with his strong sincerity and rapid and sure changes, was a hard task, and Julie Opp lacked volume and depth. But it was at a benefit also that she did, as the minstrel in Coppée's *Le Passant*, the best work I have ever seen her do.

Although *Magda* was the first performance which led me to do justice to Mrs. Fiske's brill-

iant powers, no piece of her acting has ever more wholly delighted me than one which I saw at a benefit. *Love Finds the Way* had been used at regular performances, but it, like too much else of Mrs. Fiske's work, had escaped me until a benefit happened along after the play had ceased to run regularly, and I found the side of acting which gives its surest worth. From a literary point of view the play was nothing, but it had situations which could be vivified; it was dominated by one character, and of that Mrs. Fiske and not the author was the creator. In the first act the cripple comes before us, intelligent, sensitive, wounded, and bitter, yet recognizing good and evil, penitent when she injures the kind, unrelenting when the dagger of her wit has been plunged into the false. How the very ease with which she handled her crutch had a meaning! It meant the suffering practice of years. The glance of the eye, the weary sinking into a chair, the restrained exclamation when once more she heard the well-meant, tactless commonplaces, made up a portrait drawn with the brush of a master. Not one jot of the embittering and warping influence of misfortune was eliminated, and yet so full, so intimate, was the treatment that, even when the cripple snapped at everybody about her, we understood; and *tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*. Then the play goes on, and this



poor creature reaches out for love. The softness of happy dreams comes into her world. Her nature begins to bud. As her brave soul stands on the brink of a real life, while we never forget that it is the first draught of happiness in all the weary years, a fellow-sufferer offers to dash the cup from her hand. Now again there is no tampering with the facts. In the ferocity with which the cripple drives her rival from the house there is no softening; it is the sincere cry of rage and grief with which she defends the best that she has ever been allowed to hope. There is no feeling for the other in it; and yet the very sincerity of her high-souled egotism teaches us to expect the inrush of other emotions when the outbreak of this is past. So it is. The cripple, whose physical disease now remains only because her mind is poisoned, realizes that the stranger lying in the snow is about to be killed by the approaching coach. Her crutch cannot be reached. She has formerly tried to walk without it, by the help of will, and fallen hopelessly. Now fright for another takes her beyond herself. Absorbed in the danger without, her eyes fixed upon the window, she almost staggers to a chair. Stopping there an instant, crying for aid, more and more swallowed up by the critical danger, in a moment, with a motion a little more like a walk, she reaches an open door. One more ineffectual cry, and she

leaves this last support, and moves off into the snow, with a gait like yours or mine, cured. Are there many things more difficult to express than such an outward and inward change? I left Mrs. Fiske's performance completely moved, to carry the picture perhaps as long as I carry anything.

Of all the performances of purely literary dramas that I have seen the one that aroused the most sincere enthusiasm in the audience was *In a Balcony*, given once at Wallack's in the fall of 1900, by Mrs. Le Moyne. When the curtain fell, applause broke out and continued in a volume almost never heard at matinées. And to think that this was Browning! The superb work of the actors was, to be sure, a large part of the cause; but it was a revelation to many to see that parts of the play which seem to read badly can be made dramatic and easy when rightly handled.

*In a Balcony* is a thoroughly characteristic Browning poem. It has the persistent vigor, the lack of taste, the redundant ratiocination, the occasional inspiration, the lack of progress. One would be justified in expecting it to fall upon the stage. It is a dramatic poem, but it is not a poetic drama. The theme in outline is threadbare enough,—a misunderstanding of the kind that does service on the stage every year; but this outline is filled with Browning argument and

Browning passion, — with hair and eyes and soul, and getting the best of life by understanding some prize moment. There would be no sense in belittling this large writer. The amount of him is so considerable, the tone so exceptionable and impressive, that when he captures a mind at all he makes it fast prisoner. But he is not Olympian — “Meredith is a prose Browning — and so is Browning.” Nor is he a great dramatist either, because he is not a playwright. He is dramatic in the sense that he gets inside of various minds and hearts and makes them talk brokenly their own language (with a Browningesque accent); but the essence of a drama, the story, with its steady and quickening march, he has not. This play, *In a Balcony*, is merely a situation, and a dozen times, when the theatre-goer is made to believe that something is about to happen, a halt is called, and the argument is elaborated. There are great dramas which are all speeches, but they are progressive, while this has no motion. Intellectually as well as physically, it is static. Of course it is able and vehement and energetic, and it is a distinguished deed to put it on the stage. It but adds to the glory of the actors to say that their brilliant skill hid the places where the play stops and drags, and gave full value to those where it starts and lives.

Mrs. Le Moyne's queen was nothing less than

perfect. To think of an improvement is impossible, and the range called for was not small. The excited entrance, the doubts, the long-pent-up ideals of sentiment, the vehement confession about her longing for love, even from a sentinel, — real love, vulgar, passionate love; the pathetic hopes; the shrinking from the truth about man's love of beauty, and then, at the end, the silent, fierce condemnation, the dreaded queen standing like hostile fate to destroy the happy lovers, — all this was flawless, and so true that tears might rise in eyes unaccustomed to them.

No less remarkable, although wholly different, was Otis Skinner's triumph. His was a harder part, because Norbert, unlike the queen, is on the scene through long stretches of undramatic talk. Mr. Skinner made rough lines smooth; filled up gaps; made pedantic phrases simple and human; illuminated, lightened, varied and clarified everything he touched; and he did it through ardor of feeling, grace, and variety of gesture and facial expression, and a constant ability, not easily analyzed, to "hold up" the scene, never to "let down," even in the least actable stretches of talk. Eleanor Robson's work as Constance, while not so accomplished, was an admirable performance for so young an actress.

While on the subject of Browning I should

like to suggest that some day one of our sporadic, independent theatres might offer to the public Browning's *The Return of the Druses*. Macready, supported by Helen Faucit and other famous actors, played *Strafford* at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1837, and it fell flat. *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* was given in 1843, with Miss Faucit as Mildred, and in 1848 revived, with Phelps as Lord Tresham, both times with only moderate success. Lawrence Barrett played it in America. Of this play Dickens wrote: "I know no love like it, no passion like it, no moulding of a splendid thing after its conception like it. And I swear that it is a tragedy that *must* be played; and must be played, moreover, by Macready."

*The Return of the Druses*, which seems to me more fitted to the stage, has never been attempted. The scenes are picturesque, the plot strong, the blank verse frequently powerful.

The first act is a picture of some Druses of Lebanon, who have settled in an islet of the Southern Sporades. The quarrels and disputes of the wild Druses, at the same time that they give a vivid and picturesque scene, prepare the way rather naturally for the story. They are excited over a report that their old god Hakeem has returned to earth, in the person of Djabal, who that day is to glorify himself and lead his tribe back to Lebanon.

The second act shows Djabal hesitating between an avowal of his real mortal nature and an acceptance of the career of glory that he can so easily seize. His struggle is about to end in a bold avowal of the truth, when Khalil, his friend, enters to tell him that the whole nation knows his divinity and is prepared to adore him. Djabal exclaims in frequent asides that he abjures utterly all claim of divinity. Incidentally Khalil mentions Anael, his sister, whom Djabal loves. Then Djabal says to himself : —

Ay, Anael, Anael — is that said at last?  
Louder than all, that would be said, I knew !  
What does abjuring mean, confessing mean,  
To the people? Till that woman crossed my path,  
On went I, solely for my people's sake ;  
I saw her, and I then first saw myself,  
And slackened pace : " If I should prove indeed  
Hakeem — with Anael by ! "

Anael loves him and believes in his divinity. In the third act Djabal learns of the return of Anael's old lover, Loys, the only man who can prove the falsity of his claims. He resolves to run away, and tells Anael they must part. She understands him to mean that she is unworthy of his divine love.

In the fourth act Djabal pushes aside an arras to commit a political murder. There is Anael with a bloody dagger in her hand. She has done





the murder to render herself worthy of Hakeem's love. In horror Djabal confesses:—

*Djabal.* No, Hakeem, and scarce Djabal !  
I have dealt falsely, and this woe is come.  
No, hear me ere scorn blast me ! Once and ever  
The deed is mine ! Oh, think upon the past !

For a time the excited girl cannot understand,  
scarcely hears ; then she will not believe.

Why, Djabal were human only—think,  
Maani is but human, Khalil human,  
Loys is human, even—did their words  
Haunt me, their looks pursue me? . . .  
Could I with the Prefect  
And the block, there—could I see only you?  
Hang by your neck over this gulf of blood?  
Speak—I am saved ! Speak, Djabal ! Am I saved?  
[*As Djabal slowly unclasps her arms and puts her  
silently from him.*]  
Hakeem would save me ! Thou art Djabal ! Crouch !  
Bow to the dust, thou basest of our kind !

She will now share all with him, for he is a  
man, disgraced, and she loves him.

. . . To the Druses thou hast wronged ! Confess,  
Now that the end is gained—(I love thee now)  
That thou hast so deceived them (perchance love thee  
Better than ever !). Come, receive their doom  
Of Infamy ! Oh, best of all, I love thee !  
Shame with the man, no triumph with the god,  
Be mine ! Come !

But Djabal would still feign Hakeem that they might both be happy. Then Anael leaves him without a word.

The Prefect's guards enter to seize the impostor, but he is protected by Loys, who had been Djabal's friend and does not believe that he has claimed divinity. When he understands the claim, he clutches a dagger and seizes the impostor's throat. Djabal is so calm and silent that Loys cannot strike. Instead, he demands and receives a promise that Djabal will kill himself if a single Druse will openly accuse him of imposture.

Djabal's trial occupies the fifth act. The Druses waver between belief and doubt. As Djabal enters, they demand that he exalt himself. He puts them off. A man, he says, is too good for them; they have no right to demand a god. Let any Druse challenge his divinity, and then "let who moves perish at my foot."

His defiance is successful. All start back. Only one starts forward, a veiled figure, to challenge the god. The veil is torn aside. It is Anael. All are astonished; Loys is exultant. As the Druses fall back, Djabal approaches Anael.

And was it thou betrayed me? 'Tis well !  
Nor 'tis much evil thou inflictest : life  
Ends here. The cedars shall not wave for us ;  
For there was crime, and must be punishment.  
See fate ! By thee I was seduced, by thee

I perish . . .  
 I love thee, I who did not love before !  
*Anael.* Djabal !  
*Djabal.* It seemed love, but it was not love.  
 How could I love while thou adorest me ?  
 Now that thou despisest, art above me so  
 Immeasurably ! Thou, no other doonest  
 My death now ; this my steel shall execute  
 Thy judgment ; I feel thy hand in it !  
 Oh, luxury to worship, to submit,  
 Transcendent, doomed to death by thee !

*Anael.* My Djabal !  
*Djabal.* Dost hesitate ? I force thee, then ! Approach,  
 Druses ! for I am out of reach of faith,  
 No further evil awaits me. Speak the doom !  
 Hear, Druses, and hear, Nuncio, and hear, Loys !  
*Anael.* Hakeem ! [*She falls dead.*]

The Druses scream, grovelling in the dust  
 before him ; all is Djabal's. For a moment he  
 would confess the truth ; then the old dream re-  
 turns. He points to Kahlil, whom he commands  
 the Druses to follow to Lebanon as Hakeem's  
 delegate. He leans over Anael :—

Ah, did I dream I was to have, this day,  
 Exalted thee ? A vain dream ; hast thou not  
 One greater exaltation ? What remains  
 But press to thee, exalt myself to thee ?  
 Thus I exalt myself, set free my soul !

As he says the last words, he stabs himself,  
 staggers toward the promised land a few steps,  
 and falls dead.

This might well be tried on the stage. The movement is simpler, stronger, and more theatrical than in Browning's other plays.

A notable modern play, given by Mr. Sargent's pupils, was *A Failure*, by Björnstjerne Björnson, acted well enough to let the unusual qualities of the drama appear clearly. The interest is intellectual rather than dramatic; but for a play which appeals almost exclusively to the analytic interests, the theatrical effectiveness is unusual. The theme is one entirely familiar in modern realistic literature, but it is handled with rare ease and distinction.

Tjalde, a business man, is shown in the first act in his family. One of his daughters shows how severe her ideas and those of some of her friends are toward men who speculate and fail. The other illustrates the easy, pecuniary extravagance of a rich man's daughter. The wife is ill, suffering, and roughly treated by her preoccupied husband. He is supposed to be prosperous. In reality he is beyond his depth, deceiving on all sides, grasping at straws. The unexpected presence of the lawyer for the banks from which Tjalde borrows, confirms his fears that a crisis is at hand. His last hope, heightened by his intense dread and panic, is a rich banker, Lind, who has just arrived. The bank attorney is to return for

a talk at five. Tjalde hastily arranges a luxurious dinner for Lind at three.

This dinner scene is the second act. Lind is solemnly pleased by the extravagant flattery poured upon him, and he spurns hints against Tjalde, which are given to him on the side. The rough earnestness of a brewer whom Tjalde has asked for business reasons, the sloppiness of a clergyman, and a few other notes in distinctly drawn sketches, make a varied scene, which ends with Tjalde full of a gambler's feverish hope. It illustrates strikingly the pettiness to which pecuniary fear drives a man in his social relations.

The third act is the ablest. Most of it is calm talk, and yet it holds the attention relentlessly. The bank attorney quietly, detail by detail, proves to Tjalde his essential insolvency, and demands that he declare himself bankrupt. The former's writhings, the pathetic and abandoned efforts to escape of the doomed man, make the drama of this scene, and they are superbly handled by the playwright. When he has thoroughly destroyed the insane hopes of the bankrupt, the lawyer leaves, after forcing a promise that Tjalde will tell the truth to his wife.

The fourth act shows the stricken speculator trying to avoid even this exposure to his wife. She already knows it, and tries to comfort him. Then he would sneak away to other lands with-

out telling the children, but the police have surrounded the house. The daughters learn. The extravagant one takes it all with simple decency. The other sulks, lays out plans for herself, and hurts her father with every word. The brewer, who has signed his obligations, comes to upbraid him. The workmen threaten the house, and are sent off with their week's wages paid out of the wife's savings. One friend is faithful — the confidential clerk who has loved the less amiable daughter and been spurned by her. He offers his \$7000 of savings to his old employer. The interview with him is left to the daughter, and the scene in which he turns from her for her meanness and mistrust is full of unobtrusive power. The daughter's heart is touched, and the play ends with the wretched gambler retreating to the bedroom to rest, cheered on to new and honest efforts by a united family.

The theme is hardly one for the general theatre, but the play is a piece of literature, and, for the few, is specially interesting in content.

Realistic plays from the French have not been much in favor. There has been nothing of Becque, for instance, although he gets into Sarcey's list of French plays of the century, which he thinks posterity will put first: —

“*Mercadet*, a comedy equal to the best of

Molière, which all connoisseurs admire, and which will never earn a cent because women dislike it.

"*Le Gendre de M. Poirier*, which is the most finished specimen of temperate comedy.

"A piece or two of Alexandre Dumas. I should incline to choose *La Dame aux Camélias*, whose subject, like that of *Manon Lescault*, is eternal, or *Les Idées de Mme. Aubrey*, the one which is, as a whole, the most logical and the most passionate of that master.

"Perhaps, as an archæological curiosity, *La Parisienne*, by Becque; *Le Chandlier*, by Alfred de Musset, who also will never please anybody but cultivated people without prejudices.

"*Le Monde où l'on s'Ennuie* will be on this list."

Really the only example of the contemporary French problem play that we have had here was one used at the Comédie Française, *Les Tenailles*, by Paul Hervieu, badly adapted, and acted too slowly by the Independent Theatre Company. The French ending is logical. The husband, whose insistence on legal rights lasts ten years and makes the whole dramatic motive, holds to them in the French to the bitter end, while a most improbable and weak mitigation was sprung in the last act, rendering the play more "pleasant" and far less convincing.

It is in no way a distinguished or noteworthy drama. Surely as commonplace an effort, had it contained no "problem," would not have been selected from the shelves full of dramatic expression by a group of earnest persons standing ostensibly for better art than the average theatre admits. I do not object to "problems" — far from it — as an element in the drama, but it is a sad mistake to think that a problematic subject is an excuse for an uninspired drama. To illustrate: while *El Gran Galeoto*, *John Gabriel Borkman*, and an occasional other result of this love for foreign masterpieces have been inspiring divergences from the beaten track in New York, *Ties* was undoubtedly inferior artistically to many things seen at the regular theatres the same year, including *Becky Sharp*, *The Tyranny of Tears*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *Carmen*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Nance Oldfield*, *The Ghetto*, *Children of the Ghetto*, *Sherlock Holmes*, *The Devil's Disciple*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and *Beau Brummel*. What is wanted to lift the stage in this country is work that is better than the average artistically, not merely plots about questions in which Paris happens to be more interested than we are.

Robert Fergan, a strong-willed Philistine, has married a girl of sixteen, who soon chafes in a loveless life, and asks for divorce. Fergan refuses,



even though she tells him she loves another. She takes her lover freely then, and submits outwardly to her husband. Ten years pass. She is practically a prisoner in a house in the country. The husband wishes to send away the child to school. After a row, in which his will again threatens to conquer, she exclaims that the child is not his. In the French he relentlessly asserts his rights again, as the child-in-law belongs to him. In English, after remorselessly following one path for a decade, he changes in two seconds, becomes kind and reasonable, admits his error, and leaves the child to its mother. The rest is dialogue, — fairly dramatic, — but so familiar, so threadbare, so “enlightened.” It would be a good play, fairly good, on ordinary standards. Pretending to anything else, it falls. It gave me feelings which are satisfied by the quotation from memory, and therefore possibly inaccurate, of a stanza from James Jeffrey Roche: —

“ Oh, the ifness saddening,  
And the whichness maddening,  
And the but ungladdening,  
That lie behind,  
When the inner token  
Of love is broken  
In the speech unspoken  
Of mind to mind.”

From the classic French, the most important play was *Tartuffe*, so well played by the students

of the Sargent School that it seems a pity not to find a way of getting the great comedy before the general public. The translation was excellent. Of course, the loss of the verse was felt, but the translator gave good prose, so much preferable to doggerel or bad rhyme. The individual actors were surprisingly competent, especially those in three leading parts, and the management showed discretion and taste in the general style of the acting. It was stately, picturesque, just quick enough, and there was no underscoring of the humor. There was a trifle more business than the French would give, but it was slight and a perfectly just consequence of the absence of the flashing poetry of the original. If there were a theatre in New York devoted regularly to catering to educated tastes, this comedy, given just as it was by these students, would deserve a series of performances and surely please a picked audience. It must be rare that a school representation of one of the foremost plays in the world is so adequate that the dramatic and intellectual beauties of the masterpiece are distinctly seen. As Molière is more than any other author the founder of modern stage-craft, we see in *Tartuffe* devices that we see every day; but how deeply is the difference brought home between the genius and the ordinary practitioner, as the well-known situations and sentiments are unfolded by the

hand of the greatest comedian of the modern world.

The same school also gave *Un Caprice*, played for the first time in this country, but without the quality which makes Musset's comedies fascinating. It is, indeed, almost impossible to translate him — probably quite impossible, unless a prose Fitzgerald should happen along — somebody that is entirely different from Fitzgerald, but capable of doing for this French genius of simplicity and subtlety what so few translators ever do. The translation used was accurate (except where "decency," I suppose, suggested such translations as "exchequer" for *tiroirs*); it was in good English; but it had none of the fairy grace, the escaping literary lights and shades that are so strangely unanalyzable in the original. Then, also, it is difficult to think of a harder dramatist to act. To play his scenes at all requires the highest artistic finish and distinction. Without intellectual elegance he is nothing, and the Français at its best could do no more than enough to bring him out. It is a matter of course that students, especially American students, should do nothing with him.

One other French classic, given by these students, was the fifteenth-century farce, *Pathelin*.

No wonder Molière and La Fontaine, as well as fifteenth-century audiences, liked this play.

Oliver Herford's prologue contrasted the love of action in the drama with the present love of talk. Our plays now, according to this "prelude," consist of a first act, in which the characters tell what happened before the play began; a second act, in which telegrams relate what other people are doing; and a third act, which relates what will befall when the play is over. "Do you pay money to hear people talk?" asks the revived fifteenth-century shepherd.


There is no lack of stir in *Pathelin*, and the quiet plot is provided with a simple and sufficient satire worthy of Molière, as well as with its own early zest. The mere outline is one of those simple delights of genius that do their work without complications. The knave Pathelin inveigles a draper out of some cloth, which he does not intend to pay for. He takes it home to his wife. The draper calls, and the husband and wife both pretend that he is ill and delirious, until the draper believes he must have been mistaken in the identity of his customer. Pathelin becomes the attorney for a shepherd who has been stealing the draper's sheep, under promise of big pay, and tells him to pretend idiocy by answering "Bah!" like a sheep to every question. The honest draper, his own lawyer, mingling his case against Pathelin with that against the boy, is confused and laughed out of court. Pathelin then

tries to collect his fee, and is met by the reply "Bah!" This is the outline, and it is filled in with a lively, never ceasing rush of incident, with quick satiric hits for which the action never stops.

Two English classics have been tried, in my memory, by this school, with unfortunate results. Congreve's *Love for Love* was played à la Daly, as if it were a farce of action and bustling situation. The butchery of the text was less deadly than the loss of the dialogue, which is everything in Congreve, in running about, gesticulating, and hasty delivery, in an attempt to make the play go, like one of the things which contemporary actors understand. The audience applauded vigorously in the wrong places, that is, whenever the acting succeeded in getting the upper hand of the dialogue. The increase in smart contemporary comedy may at least teach us something about the style of acting proper for the Restoration.

A medal for the worst adaptation ever seen ought to have been presented to the man who made the version of *The Coxcomb* played by graduates of the Sargent School. Anybody who formed his opinions of Beaumont and Fletcher from that singular concoction would be wholly justified in deeming the Elizabethans demented. *The Coxcomb* is not a very remarkable play, but

it has a consistent plot (or rather two independent consistent plots), some witty dialogue, one interesting character, and a few passages of beauty. This awful adaptation carefully elided all these features and gave a series of utterly confused and meaningless scenes, no character, no comprehensible story, very few of the beautiful passages, a little of the original dialogue, a little of the adapter's own, and a good deal of distended business intended to supply the place of the original words. It must frankly be admitted that *The Coxcomb* in its original form is impossible to-day, and there is no great cause to regret it; but a moderately skilful literary hack could have done the needful butchery in such a way that the character of Antonio, which gives the whole meaning to the main plot, would be made clear, and he would have kept more of the dialogue, or found wittier substitutes for it. He would have given fewer scenes, perhaps, and allowed some of the important ones to keep their effect. As there are, however, a number of Elizabethan plays of great literary interest, combined with structural adaptability to our stage and our ideas, the lack of occasional experiment with them in New York is rather surprising.



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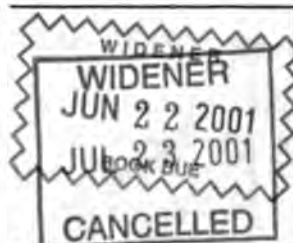


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